

In this overview of contemporary theories of sexuality, I trace sexuality as a public and political issue. The purpose is to understand how a supposedly private issue became a space to regulate bodies, but also a space for marginal subjects to contest norms. Theories I consider will discuss in numerous ways the political importance of history, social constructionism, essentialism, desire, bodies, identity, community, and normativity. I follow the field's trajectory by examining four major movements: psychoanalysis, feminism, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory, and their initial and continuing impact on how sexuality is theorized.

Psychoanalysis and the Feminist Response

Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) is foundational to understanding contemporary theories of sexuality. He theorizes sexuality as a polymorphous innate drive. Through this, Freud problematizes late nineteenth and early twentieth notions that inverse sexual object choice and perversion are degenerative or innate drives that only reside within a small "defective" portion of the population. Instead, all people possess a potential for sexual deviation because all sexuality is perverse. Normative sexuality is not a biological condition, but the creation of familial, cultural, and legal restrictions and enticements.¹ These are

¹ Sigmund Freud *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

In *The Function of the Orgasm* (1927), Wilhelm Reich politicizes Sigmund Freud's work to argue that sexual repression is part of class domination. Psychic and physical health depends on the subject's ability to access pleasure via their innate sexuality. Bourgeoisie culture suppresses sexual pleasure to pacify the proletariat through blocking psychic energy flow, which creates irrationally dependent subjects. Duty and morality replace the pleasure that comes from natural sexuality and work. In *The Sexual Revolution* (1936), he writes that natural sexuality (which

internalized through identifications within the Oedipus complex and become the reality principle, which represses or sublimates the pleasure principle.² The pleasure principle is a propensity to release excitation through pleasurable (sexual) activities and avoid unpleasurable experiences. The reality principle fails to fully control subjects' unconscious tendencies towards pleasure, allowing subjects to partake in unacceptable acts.³

In Freud's most popular work, "Civilization and Its Discontents," (1930) he expands the reality principle and father figure explicitly onto the cultural level by describing subjects submitting to civilization as following father's laws. Submission is motivated by the desire to avoid helplessness and prolong life. The super-ego (internalized authority) sublimates the desire for genital love to create aim-inhibited libido-drive objects, such as friends and family. This connects subjects to others in order to create communities, relational patterns, and kinship rules. From here, Freud complicates his previous notion of the unconscious by elaborating on the death drive, a process that attempts to revert the subject to an early state, the inorganic, by seeking homeostasis within the psyche. The death drive causes subjects to recoil from the external

he defines in heterosexual and monogamous terms) would allow a subject to feel independent and responsible, thus creating a more egalitarian-communitarian world.

Herbert Marcuse also pairs psychoanalysis with Marxism, but writes that Reich ignores historical trajectory, downplays the role of labor within repression, and over-emphasizes sexual liberation. Advanced capitalism and the entrance of female labor creates moments where women can access the material and gain a subjectivity beyond sexualized object. By gaining a voice and using aggression, women can reach for equality within capitalism. At this moment, feminist must remember Marxist critique and know that equality within capitalism is not freedom. (In "Feminist Theory and the Frankfurt School," (2006) Wendy Brown also raises this point.) Marcuse argues that a new morality lies in phantasy, the source of the refusal from anxiety and the creation of new forms of relating and being ("Marxism and Feminism" (1974) and *Eros and Civilization* (1955)).

Additionally, Marcuse critiques Freud's basis of civilization as limited and unimaginative. For Freud, civilization begins with the pleasure principle's repression or sublimation and the subsequent creation of the reality principle. Marcuse agrees, but states that just because historically civilizations have been organized around extreme pleasure repression does not mean it is the only model (*Eros and Civilization* (1955)).

² Diana Fuss interrogates Freud's contradictory and inconsistent use of "identification" and "sexual desire." Freud separates them, but keeps them in relation; desire is a more developed version of identification. Desire is a wanting to possess the other, while identification is a wanting to be the other. Fuss states that the processes cannot be differentiated and their persistent presence creates new fantasies and challenges to identities. This allows the potential for undermining the subject's views of normative behavior and ways of being. Identification is where subjects become political and subjugated. It is where the social affects the psychic. Fuss sees identification and desire's convoluted nature to be a site for disruption (Diana Fuss *Identification Papers* (1995)).

³ Sigmund Freud *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1920)

world's stimuli. This desire for isolation runs counter to the pleasure principle and is therefore often frustrated, but continues to seek isolation. In this movement, Freud destabilizes the concept of a normal and stable subject through theorizing an incomplete subject, who fails societal expectations and whose unconscious is always in turmoil; "our own ego is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant."⁴

Jacques Lacan was a French psychoanalyst, who began writing and lecturing on psychoanalysis in the early 1930s, but gained recognition for his work between the World Wars. He reiterates Freud's incomplete subject, but theorizes the unconscious as a product of letters (signifiers). The subject enters language and knowing through the fallible linguistic structure that never covers all possible signifieds. The signifier itself does not access the signified, but enters the signified allowing a confusion to occur between the two. Additional inaccuracies result from signifiers sliding over signifieds causing signifiers to define each other instead of allowing a concrete relation between the signified and the signifier. This feature of language splits desire. Desire is never satisfied because language cannot capture what exists. The endless chain of desire correlates to the signifier's movement over signifieds.⁵ From here, Lacan theorizes that the unconscious is not innate but instead the letter's product; the unconscious is structured like language. Subjects learn this system from and through their relation to the Other, as exemplified in the Oedipus complex. Sexuality rises from the subject's desire for what they lack; structure of language/ unconscious possesses a lack because of the gap between the signified and signifier.⁶ Lacan labels this gap "jouissance," a negative instance that seemingly serves no purpose. The law and norms, which are akin to one's "conscience" or an imperative to act in accord with an inferred, attempt to manage jouissance; hence the existence of laws and norms against non-

⁴ Sigmund Freud "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1930) 724

⁵ Jacques Lacan "Agency of the Letter" (1977)

⁶ Jacques Lacan "The Subject and the Other" (1977)

reproductive sexual practices or sexual practices for pleasure alone. Since subjects desire their lack, men desire the lacking subject and women desire the phallic possessor. Desire never receives satisfaction and always demand encores.⁷ Sexual desire is a never-ending cycle of unfulfilled desires (created by language) and that all named desires and identities are simplifications of the subject.⁸

Luce Irigaray elaborates on Lacan's theory by stating that within the symbolic women lack a sexual organ and a proper name. This denies women the ability to signify. Women and their sexuality are defined within the masculine symbolic order. Female sexuality is then just an extension of masculine sexual fantasies.⁹ Women only enter the symbolic order as a transaction between men. Women serve as the economic material that define relationships between men (father to son-in-law) and reproduce and maintain the phallogocentric system.¹⁰ Women become alienated from their labor and sexuality through their separation from the symbolic and the

⁷ Jacques Lacan *Seminar XX: Encore* (1999)

⁸ Jacques Lacan "The Subject and the Other" (1977)

⁹ Luce Irigaray "This Sex Which Is Not One" (1977)

¹⁰ Gayle Rubin creates a similar argument when she questions Marxist accounts of female oppression and instead theorizes the "sex/gender system" to explain the organizing of biological sexuality and procreation into social relations and ways of being. Using Claude Levi-Straus, she examines marriage as a foundation form of gift exchange that creates kinship between men through exchanging women. This oppression is a heterosexual patriarchal tradition, not a biological imperative. Rubin uses psychoanalysis to describe how kinship's gender and sex divisions replicate and deform humans into men and women. She relies on Lacan's theory of acculturation through phallic language. One man passes phallic power or "legitimacy" to another through the exchange of a woman; she never possesses the phallus. Men use the set of symbolizations associated with the phallus to attempt to govern sexuality and the relations of the two sexes. Rubin argues that feminists must dissolve the Oedipus complex to stop the sex divide and then re-imagine kinship through androgynous and sexually liberated subjects ("The Traffic in Women" (1975)).

In *Antigone's Claim* (2002), Judith Butler does just that. She challenges the Oedipus complex's position that pre-social relations form social norms. She replaces Oedipus with Antigone and dismisses the notion of a natural or innate state of desire, which she charges Freud with theorizing. Instead, social forces create the incest taboo to construct a normative desire. An Antigone model removes the public-private and kinship-sociality dichotomies. This invites ambiguities around social boundaries, destabilizes desire, and refuses the easy representation available within the Oedipus complex (the modern family). Antigone allows for a "productive crisis," where the "inhuman" can speak as human and unravel or revise normativity.

Later, in "Thinking Sex" (1984), Rubin reworks her theory of the sex/gender system and divorces gender and sexuality to explain the sexuality/gender hierarchy more accurately; lesbians are persecuted as women and lesbians, not solely women. Later in "The First Homosexuality?" (1997), David Halperin argues that this model explains the different histories of male and female homosexuality. Lesbians' double oppression caused less historical shifts and visibility.

material; their only value is their exchange value as defined by the needs of men¹¹ (wife, mother, virgin, prostitute).¹² Helene Cixous agrees that phallogentric language economically and politically represses women. Unlike Irigaray, Cixous proposes writing as a way for women to realize how removed they are from their sexuality and inner-strength. Writing tears women away from the guilt of not fulfilling men's needs and allows for the creation of new ways of living.¹³ Julia Kristeva explains the creation of cultural hierarchies as residing within the unconscious. The superego's development constructs a boundary between the civilized (clean) and uncivilized (unclean) that helps define normative. The recognition of abject questions boundaries between the acceptable and the rejected (filthy, unknowable, dangerous, polluting). The normative subject must identify with the civilized and veer from the abject, which separates him from the other. Within patriarchal culture, femininity and feminizing sexuality are primary abjections. Female sexuality is only appropriate if the aim is procreation; feminine sexuality for pleasure and non-heteronormative sexuality are abject. Kristeva remarks that aversion through abjection provides a stronger regulatory force than prohibition alone.¹⁴

Kristeva uses psychoanalysis's unfinished subject and Lacan's unconscious as structured through language to create an ethical position. Unlike Lacan, she defines language as poetic. The subject's relation to language traps them between sense and nonsense. This reinforces the split between the subject's unconscious and conscious creating the uncertain subject or "subject-in-process." She provides the pregnant mother and her fetus as the most literal example of the

¹¹ Mary Jane Sherfey and Ann Koedt argue against a vaginal orgasm. This myth perpetuates a feminine sexuality that provides men with optimum pleasure, while denying women access to pleasure. Men deny the clitoris's role because they fear that women will no longer need them. Sexuality needs to be rethought with the clitoris in mind (Mary Jane Sherfey *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality* (1973) and Ann Koedt "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" (1970)).

¹² Luce Irigaray "Women on the Market" (1985)

¹³ Helene Cixous "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1974)

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva "Powers of Horror" (1982)

process within all subjects.¹⁵ Kristeva holds the position of the foreigner, who is lost, confused, and estranged as an ethical model of the “subject-in-process.” Encountering the world as a foreigner allows subjects to become aware of Otherness, the repressed drives within them and allows moments for the object to become an option.¹⁶

Tim Dean uses Lacan’s symbolic order to tear sexuality away from the private personal (psychological) and into public culture. The trans-individual linguistic structure allows subjectivity to be discussed at the cultural level and explain collective feelings towards sexuality. Sexuality’s pervasiveness moves sexuality beyond genitalia, allowing sexual fantasies to dwell upon more than sexual acts. This leads to Dean to the assumption that objects (because sexual fantasy is beyond sex) lie at the heart of desire, not subjects. Intersubjective desire develops when subjects sublimate the desire of an object onto a subject. Through this, Dean connects powerful aesthetic experiences and sexual relations since both originate in sublimation and cause a subject to momentarily lose their conscious understanding of self. Dean wishes subjects to move beyond sexuality and create inventive aesthetic experiences that approach *jouissance* and cause another way to disrupt the ego to become available. By impersonalizing desire through language and aesthetics, Dean allows norms to be challenged in the symbolic order.¹⁷

Leo Bersani contributes a theorization similar to Dean’s, but uses Freud to reach his conclusion. Bersani agrees with Freud that sexuality is sublimated because it is an over-stimulating destructive force. Sexuality frustrates the death drive. This frustration disrupts the ego and could potentially destroy the ego’s normative form allowing for new possibilities within subjects. Additionally, sexuality’s sublimation creates energy used in the creation of cultural texts; art makes desire visible. Because of this connection, Bersani sees art as having the same

¹⁵ Julia Kristeva “From One Identity to Another” (1977)

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva “Strangers to Ourselves” (1994)

¹⁷ Tim Dean *Beyond Sexuality* (2000)

potential for self-shattering as sexuality. He reads art for the disruption and disappearance of form to see its potential to create self-shattering pleasure.¹⁸

Juliet Mitchell calls for feminists to reconsider their dismissal of Freud and psychoanalysis. Mitchell contends that Freud's explanation of the unconscious and the formation of subjects explains patriarchy, not reinforces it. Patriarchal history lies in the unconsciousness and explains the perpetual subordination of women through the Oedipus complex, which internalizes the law of the father; this law must be maintained to subside the guilt caused by the primordial father's murder.¹⁹ The management and exchange of women is done through his law and subsequently ties families together thus creating society. This places women as the reproducers of humanity. Because this is unconscious, people believe that the management of sexuality and women is natural and necessary. Mitchell pleads for feminists to understand femininity as the product of the patriarchal unconscious and contend with this process, instead of rejecting reality for a utopian fantasy.²⁰ Jacqueline Rose continues the psychoanalytic intervention into feminism by demonstrating the how a fully acculturated individual never occurs; the super-ego, established by the patriarchal culture, never completely controls the subject. Subjects often fail to conform to culturally imposed identities and their corresponding norms. This creates a space to dismiss the supposed inherent nature of identities and create new ways of being. Both Mitchell and Rose challenge essentialist and social constructionist feminism and their use of the feminine identity as a stronghold and source of power.²¹ Instead, the psychoanalytic feminism turns femininity and the Unconscious into the core concern.²²

¹⁸ Leo Bersani *The Freudian Body* (1986)

¹⁹ As described in Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913)

²⁰ Juliet Mitchell *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974)

²¹ Tim Dean and Christopher Lane intervene within gay and lesbian studies and queer theory as Mitchell and Rose do in feminism. They resituate Freud's view of same-sex object choice as quite radical because he saw homosexual desire within everyone's sexuality. The residence of sexuality within the unconscious gives sexuality studies a way of discussing its object outside the worn-out essentialist-constructionist debate, while disrupting and reorienting

Shulamith Firestone opposes Mitchell and Rose's ascertain that there is no inherent biological reason that women are subordinate to men. She writes that the prevalent sex class system begins with a natural sex division, but is reinforced socially. Pregnancy, child rearing, menstruation, and menopause weaken women and allow patriarchal control. Women's biology is a liability. Firestone agrees with Freud that sexual repression harms subjects. Freud, however, never questions the foundation of society, just analyzes it and adjusts patients (namely women) into coping with the patriarchy's affects. Patriarchy is the result of men turning an oppressive fantasy into reality; Freud helps sustain that reality. The nuclear family, love, and romance subdue subjects allowing economic and ideological domination via the illusion of free choice. Humanity has risen above its animality and with this should shed its natural sex class system. Technology could free women from reproductive roles and free humanity from labor. Simultaneously, gender distinction would disappear and sexuality would follow Freud's polymorphous perversity. This revolution ends the tyranny of capitalism and patriarchy.²³

Kate Millet and Simone de Beauvoir argue that patriarchy places women into a secondary position; womanhood is not natural, but a learned subjugated position.²⁴ The definition of humanity and all social institutions are male centric; women are placed outside humanity and are always secondary to the masculine. This creates an oppositional relationship between the genders and hostility towards women;²⁵ systemic patriarchy denies men and women the ability to see commonalities. Both theorists take issue with psychoanalysis's position within patriarchy. Millet

conventional thought on static and identity-based sexuality (Tim Dean and Christopher Lane *Homosexuality & Psychoanalysis* (2000)).

²² Jacqueline Rose "Femininity and Its Discontents" (1983)

²³ Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970)

²⁴ To prove this, Millet relies on John Money's 1965 psychological study, which theorizes that sexual difference is non-existent at birth. It is only through oppressive socialization that gender norms are learned (John Money "Psychosexual Differentiation").

²⁵ Millet sees the penis as a violent weapon and symbol of worth. Sexual intercourse becomes a way to reaffirm power and the male ego, while punishing and reminding women of their subservient, subhuman position.

misinterprets Freud and states that he theorizes women's place and fractured subjectivity as their biological destiny, not a product of patriarchy.²⁶ French existentialist De Beauvoir argues that psychoanalysis is a closed system that never allows subjects to negotiate the world on their own emotional and psychical terms. Freud is not a biological determinist, but never provides an account of why men dominate. This is because psychoanalysis is masculine-oriented; all female transgressions replicate masculinity, instead of being from a woman's desire. De Beauvoir disagrees and writes that women can transcend and assert sexuality and being. De Beauvoir insists on studying the lives of women in a unity of being, instead of just their femininity. Seeking equality without contending with other inequalities is impossible. The illusion of nature denies access to equality. However, humanity does and can transcend biology and therefore the illusion of nature through social organization and technology. De Beauvoir argues for a movement towards a system that treats men and women as not different and allows subjects to define themselves. This would dissolve gender and most current psychoanalytic issues. Millet's politics make the same movements, but rely on a politics of exposing gender constructs as false. This would create a space to reeducate subjects outside of the sexual caste system.²⁷

The Lesbian Intervention

Millet, de Beauvoir, and Firestone lay significant groundwork within feminism that influences a branch of feminism that critiques patriarchy's insistence on heterosexual monogamy from the lesbian position. In "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," Adrienne Rich argues that patriarchal culture imposing heterosexuality onto women by marginalizing

²⁶ In "The Straight Mind" (1980), Monique Wittig makes the same claim.

²⁷ Kate Millet *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Simone de Beauvoir *The Second Sex* (1949)

lesbianism and causing feminists to never questioning heterosexuality's naturalness.²⁸ This erases lesbianism, non-heterosexual women, and any semblance of sexual or relational choice. Feminism's goal should be to break sexuality away from always being male-orientated and create a women-centric relationality. Rich uses the term "lesbian continuum" to expand the definition of lesbian beyond those interested in women sexually. Instead, it connotes women-identified experiences.²⁹ These experiences could counter patriarchal social relations. Choosing to be a lesbian is to actively create relations with other women and fight patriarchy; it is political.³⁰ The Radicalesbians, the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, Cheryl Clarke, Nett Hart, and Monique Wittig reiterate this sentiment. The Radicalesbians assert that women-identified lesbianism is necessary to end patriarchy. Heterosexual feminists should end their relations with men and commit themselves to women and feminism.³¹ The Leeds group argues that women should not have sex with men, but do not have to be sexually active with women. Women need to identify as lesbians for political, not sexual, reasons.³² Clarke and Hart see lesbianism as a defiant stance against the patriarchal nation. Lesbianism decolonizes women's minds, questions the prevailing unequal structures, and reawakens all women's passion for other women. To be a feminist, one must take an active stance against heterosexuality and refuse to engage with the patriarchal world. Lesbianism is an alternative world-making existence.

Interestingly, Clarke's refusal to work within patriarchy does not extend to white supremacy. She sees working with white lesbians as necessary; it should be noted that Clarke was partnered with

²⁸ Christine Overall agrees with Rich that compulsory heterosexuality is rampant and that feminists cannot be heterosexual unless they have rejected heterosexuality naturalness. Overall is wary of feminists who desire men, but tolerates heterosexuality as long as it is a practice and not a way of being (Christine Overall "Heterosexuality and Feminist Theory" (1990)).

²⁹ Pat Califia argues that lesbian is a woman who receives and provides sexual pleasure to another woman. Any adjustment of this loses specificity and hides the horror that lesbians faced for loving and engaging in sex act with women.

³⁰ It should be noted that she does differentiate the lesbian continuum from being a lesbian who has sex with women.

³¹ Radicalesbians "Woman-Identified Woman" (1970)

³² Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group "Political Lesbianism" (1979)

a white women at the time. This reveals Clarke's illogic attempt to control desire and refusal to understand another's desire; to deny a black lesbian (her) relationships with women lesbians is racist (it blocks her desire), but to deny heterosexual women access to men is political.³³

Monique Wittig dismisses the idea that women are a natural group³⁴ through the existence of lesbianism, a culture without women. Women are defined in relation to men; so lesbians are not-women. Lesbianism must be embraced because it is the only form in existence that provides free living outside the political, cultural, and economic definitions of gender.³⁵ Shelia Jeffreys's agrees with Wittig's politics, but argues that lesbians still deal with patriarchy in their everyday lives; lesbianism does not remove lesbians from patriarchy.³⁶ Shelia Jeffreys offers the extreme social construction and political choice model of lesbianism as the healthiest model to fight male oppression of women through familial structures and male-centric sexuality. Lesbian feminists construct communities through companionship, constantly critiquing power relations, and forming new ways of relating outside of sexuality. She uses Audre Lorde's idea that the erotic is bracketed to the bedroom by patriarchy and that women need to rediscover the erotic pleasure within their everyday lives.³⁷ Her critique of sexuality should not be taken as anti-sex, but as revealing power structures. She echoes the Radicalesbian's stance of breaking away from men by warning lesbians not to ally themselves with gay men; this would only create paths to objectification, dominant-submissive terms, and woman hating.³⁸

Working off the lesbian-as-inherent-political writers premise, Catherine MacKinnon details how compulsory heterosexuality and men's economic domination sustain each other.

³³ Cheryl Clarke "Lesbianism" (1981) and Nett Hart "Lesbian Desire as Social Action" (1990)

³⁴ She cites Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) to further prove her point.

³⁵ Monique Wittig "One is Not Born a Woman" (1980)

³⁶ Shelia Jeffreys *Lesbian Heresy* (1994)

³⁷ Audre Lorde "Uses of the Erotic" (1981)

³⁸ Shelia Jeffrey *Lesbian Heresy* (1994)

Women's labor is low-paid and highly sexualized. To gain access to these jobs, women must make themselves appear sexually available (heterosexual) and endure sexual harassment.³⁹ The idea that women are always sexually available comes from pornography, the central and objective truth of male sexual domination of women, as explained by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. Pornography shows women as whores, so men treat women as whores. Men teach women to enjoy being treated like whores; sexual liberation is just sexual access to women.⁴⁰ Currently, men conquer women through intercourse by treating women as sexual objects and possessing them; intercourse is always the violation of women's being. Sexuality is the primary way men oppress women.⁴¹ The objectification of women is so engrained in everyday life that laws and institutions protect pornography as free speech, despite Dworkin's numerous claims of causality between pornography and the material destruction of women.⁴² The denial of sexual access leads to violence against women. They argue that state intervention is needed to end pornography and the connection between sexuality and violence.⁴³ Equality would mean never having to submit to penetration, to violation.⁴⁴ Any female happily submitting to intercourse is a political collaborator. Lesbianism is a way out of womanhood.⁴⁵

³⁹ Catherine MacKinnon *Sexual Harassment of Working Women* (1979)

⁴⁰ Shelia Jeffreys also argues that the "sexual revolution" did not cause women to gain freedom, but allowed for continued and energized sexual oppression. Key to her argument is the eroticization of power (somasochism), which she writes condones and imitates the heterosexual domination of women. Audre Lorde, from the position of a black lesbian woman, also states that the eroticization of domination reinforces the sexual domination of her communities (Shelia Jeffreys *Anti-Climax* (1991) and Audre Lorde "Interview by Susan Leigh Star" (1982)).

⁴¹ Diane Richardson makes a similar claim that sex is largely conceived in relation to the male experience. Her main concern is that lesbians should not codify what lesbian sex is; a woman using penis-shaped objects to penetrate other women is not as male-centric sex. (See Diane Richardson "Constructing Lesbian Sexualities" (1993))

⁴² Andrew Dworkin, in *Letters from a War Zone* (1993), argues that feminists do not fight against pornography because it would make them confront the men in their lives. Current feminism is complacent and asks for small changes. Their comfort causes them to refuse a radical transformation of society. Seeking equality in a systemically unequal system will never cause change. She writes, "feminism is dying here because so many women who say they are feminists are collaborators and cowards" (322).

⁴³ Andrea Dworkin "Pornography" (1981) and *Letters from a War Zone* (1993)

⁴⁴ Leo Bersani finds Dworkin and MacKinnon's discussion of sexuality useful in contributing to his idea that sexuality is not the basis for a community, since it is a violating act. He however uses their discussion to argue for the proliferation of types of pornography to reveal sex as "anticonmunal, antiegalitarian, antinuturing, antiloving,"

This strong political position created a social constructionists backlash from heterosexual feminists and lesbian feminists who did not want their sexuality to be defined solely in political terms. Marie-Jo Dhavernas argues directly against Wittig by doubting that lesbians are not women. One cannot simply remove oneself from patriarchy. Ignoring patriarchy will not make it go away and disallows understanding how patriarchy is heading in the future. Additionally, she details the work of heterosexual women who maintain egalitarian relations⁴⁶ with men and teach other women how to articulate these relations as proof that heterosexuality itself is not inherently wrong.⁴⁷ Including men only helps feminism gain momentum.⁴⁸ Dhavernas describes Wittig as distorting sexuality by describing it as a political choice and similar (lesbian-oriented) within everyone. Desire is uncontrollable and because of this heterosexual women should not be seen as traitors to the feminist cause. Additionally, sexual sameness destroys the individual.⁴⁹ Stevi Jackson and Lynn Segal argue that Catherine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, and Shelia Jeffrey's attacks are misdirected. Women's material reality and oppression should be the focus of feminist discourse and not the condemnation of heterosexual women. Segal continues de-demonizing heterosexual sex by illustrating how sexual acts make both sexes vulnerable and can be

but still something desired by subjects to experience immense pleasure and powerlessness (Leo Bersani "Is the Rectum the Grave?" (1987)).

⁴⁵ Catharine MacKinnon "Feminism, Marxist, Method and the State" (1982) and *Feminism Unmodified* (1987) and Andrea Dworkin *Intercourse* (1987)

⁴⁶ Stevi Jackson reiterates that heterosexuality is not inherently patriarchal and that heterosexual women are not passive victims of men's desires. Heterosexual women can challenge heterosexual practices. Jackson specifically argues against Sue Wilkinson and Cecilia Kitzinger claims that patriarchy determines all heterosexual sex and therefore the practice and identity cannot be salvaged. (Stevi Jackson "Heterosexuality, Power and Pleasure" (1995) and Sue Wilkinson and Cecilia Kitzinger "Theorizing Heterosexuality" (1992))

⁴⁷ Janet Holland, et al. work at teaching young women how to describe their sexual desires, refuse unwanted sexual advances, and think of sexuality from a non-victim position (Janet Holland, et al. "Pressured Pleasure" (1992)).

⁴⁸ Opening up of feminism to men and heterosexuals is also supported by Pat Califia in *Public Sex* (1994)

⁴⁹ Marie-Jo Dhavernas "Hating Masculinity Not Men" (1987)

pleasurable to women. Because of this, heterosexual sex acts may be a powerful space to upset gender and sexual norms.⁵⁰

Carole Vance argues that female sexual pleasure is patriarchy's fear and a uniform sexuality is feminism's.⁵¹ Feminism must enable and create situations for women to express sexual desire safely, while critiquing sexist sexual structures.⁵² Vance argues that anti-pornographers frame women as only victims, construct feminine sexuality in the "traditional" virtuous fashion, and make outrageous claims about pornography's influence. Additionally, they ignore other systemic sexist institutions that have considerably more impact than pornography, such as the nuclear family.⁵³ MacKinnon, Dworkin, and Jeffreys's ethical stance led to consorting with conservative politicians to ban sexual material and end National Endowment of the Arts funding for numerous GLBT and women artists.⁵⁴

Pat Califia and Wendy Clark argue that theorists who see lesbianism as a political choice desexualize lesbianism. The sexual desire for women, not hating men and patriarchy, is the root of lesbianism. Califia writes that women suppressing their sexual urges in not counter to

⁵⁰ Stevi Jackson "Heterosexuality, Power and Pleasure" (1995) and Lynn Segal *Straight Sex* (1994) and "Feminist Sexual Politics, and the Heterosexual Predicament" (1997)

⁵¹ Alice Echols, Lynn Segal, and Gayle Rubin write that theorists who see lesbianism as a political choice inaccurately depicts feminine sexuality as more healing, sensual, and passionate than masculine sexuality. This creates a universal and angelic version of femininity that dangerously reifies feminine stereotypes and isolates men and heterosexuals. They argue that feminism should eradicate the constructed gender and sexual differences. Segal writes that patriarchy is the enemy, not men. She promotes a socialist feminism that would eradicate gender through alliances with leftist organizations. Feminists should have autonomy and alliances. Their own agenda must be set, but they must work against larger social inequalities, which inevitably impact and distort women's lives. (This is something that MacKinnon objects to. Women have their agenda and do not need to be modified by other's agendas (Katherine MacKinnon *Feminism Unmodified* (1987))). Rubin relies on gay scholarship, particularly Jeffrey Weeks and Michel Foucault, to show sexuality as historically and socially contingent (Alice Echols "The Taming of the Id" (1992) and Gayle Rubin "Thinking Sex" (1984)).

⁵² Amber Hollibaugh is sympathetic with the lesbians-as-political camp's concern that sexuality is always about possession. But she agrees with Carol Vance that sexuality could be reconceived under the premise to provide pleasure to women (Amber Hollibaugh "Desire for the Future" (1989)).

⁵³ Gayle Rubin and Alice Echols also argue that Dworkin and MacKinnon attack a minuscule part of patriarchal apparatus and that religion, education, family, the media, etc. all play a more significant role in constructing gender inequalities (Gayle Rubin "Thinking Sex" (1984) and Alice Echols "The Taming of the Id" (1992))

⁵⁴ Carole Vance "More Pleasure, More Danger" (1992)

patriarchy, but in congruence with it.⁵⁵ Anti-pornography and anti-sadomasochist feminists use morality to oppress sexual minorities without understanding the practices of these people and destroy feminism by turning it into a single-issue cause.⁵⁶ Califia writes that sadomasochism is consensual-sexual play and the appropriation of power within a safe space where roles are exchanged. It transgresses sexual prohibitions through exploring fantasies, while dismissing biological essentialism and romantic heterosexism.⁵⁷ She embraces radical sex, which defies the dishonest and moralistic construction of sexuality and treats women not as innocents needing protection, but as adults exploring their sexuality.⁵⁸

Mary McIntosh argues against MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin's courting the state to intervene in patriarchy because the state is patriarchal. Legislation would further constrict women's lives. McIntosh argues for a politics of subversion, not reform, where women manipulate and appropriate symbols and norms.⁵⁹ Gayle Rubin agrees that state intervention just leads to sexual censorship⁶⁰ and government regulation of sexuality and bodies. The hierarchical system of sexual value's erotic injustice⁶¹ must be destroyed, instead of being replicated by anti-sex, anti-sadomasochism, anti-pornography feminists. This hierarchy effects how legislators, psychiatrists, and subjects produce and enforce sex laws and norms, which exiling subjects and

⁵⁵ Lynn Segal makes a similar argument against MacKinnon and Dworkin's stance on heterosexuality in *Straight Sex* (1994).

⁵⁶ In discussing the work of Gary Fisher, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes sadomasochism as expanding what sexuality is. She describes the scenes constructed as delinked from reality to manage issues of power that go undiscussed in most sexual relations (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick "Afterword" (1996)).

⁵⁷ In "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" (1984), Michel Foucault makes a similar argument. S&M does not search for an inner-self, but looks for new ways of experiencing pleasure and liberating violence.

⁵⁸ Pat Califia "Feminism and Sadomasochism" (1981) and *Public Sex* (1994) and Wendy Clark "The Dyke, the Feminist, and The Devil" (1982)

⁵⁹ Mary McIntosh "Liberalism and the Contradiction of Oppression" (1992)

⁶⁰ Gayle Rubin documents how anti-pornography and anti-sexuality overly regulates sexuality, hinders access to knowledge about marginal sexualities and AIDS prevention. This lack of information, aided by MacKinnon and Dworkin, exposed people to HIV and isolated GLBT community members from each other (Gayle Rubin "Afterword" (1993)).

⁶¹ Within this structure monogamous married heterosexuals are the ideal and any deviation places subjects as less valuable and respectable. The lower the sexual activity the more likely that the performer of these acts will be codified as insane or disgusting and punished through social, legal, economic and material means.

suppressing their ability to form a community. Rubin argues that sexuality should not be judged on forms, but rather on the democratic morality existing between those involved.⁶²

Diana Fuss pulls away from the essentialist-social-constructionist argument to detail how neither claim should discount the other because they are intertwined. The essentialist belief that real and fixed-properties exist, but are repressed is present in social constructionists temporal and cultural theorizations of sexuality. Essentialists see categorical fluctuations across time, but see a core as always present. While essentialism is dangerous because it pretends homogeneity exists,⁶³ dismissing it causes no foundation for political movement; feminism needs a position to act. Social constructionists categorize and label groups as similar; this is essentialism displaced, but not removed.⁶⁴ Fuss argues that dangerously creates a monolithic lesbianism that this excessively excludes and determines.⁶⁵ Fuss is against essentialism, but interested in preserving the essentialist position for political reasons. She uses Luce Irigaray to show the strength of adhering to neither camp.⁶⁶ Irigaray theorizes a feminine essence through women's "two lips;" it is not ahistorical or apolitical, but strategic and beyond cultural construction. This does not fix women into a category, but provides an always-already present position and experience beyond masculine language's determining power. Irigaray argues that short-term separatism is a powerful political strategy to create new forms of being and struggles; however, permanent

⁶² Gayle Rubin "Thinking Sex"(1984)

⁶³ Jeffreys argues that what Fuss dismisses as essentialism is not essentialism, but an attempt to find a commonality among the oppressed and committing to political action (Shelia Jeffreys *The Lesbian Heresy* (1994)).

⁶⁴ Fuss cites Lacan as following this model. Language is the discourse of the truth or essence. This unifies women into a singular group due to their relation to the phallus.

⁶⁵ She uses Monique Wittig as the exemplar case of this movement.

⁶⁶ In "*Deconstructing Historiography*" (1988), Gayatri Spivak writes that despite a group's differences it may be useful for them to come together under "strategic essentialism," an imaginary homogeneity that can create momentary political solidarity.

separatism is not a realistic or useful goal. Irigaray does not create a narrative to freedom, but a position to ground one's actions.⁶⁷

Foucault and Feminism

The work of Michel Foucault was key in the social constructionists debate, although he himself never took part in defending or attacking either side of the argument. By providing a genealogy of sexuality, he reveals its production and unnaturalness.⁶⁸ His work demonstrates the historic nature and construction of sexuality through “the regime of power-knowledge-pleasure.”⁶⁹ Subjects are produced and regulated through bio-power, the nation and institutions' power and production of knowledge, discourses, taboos, and silences. The management of life is done to ensure the nation's survival and prosperity by creating more efficient workers and a “healthy” population that produces more citizens. Sexuality became a subject of discourse because it provided direct access to subjects' bodies; it creates knowledge of the body and access/control of pleasure. Discourse positions sexuality as the way to access and understand one's truth. This version of bio-power allowed for an easy transition to industrial capitalism. The controlled population and body effortlessly fit into capitalists' machines.

A key feature of Foucault's discussion is that sexuality is not repressed, but produced.⁷⁰

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, discourses produce labels and models of the licit

⁶⁷ Diana Fuss *Essentially Speaking* (1989)

⁶⁸ Nancy Fraser sees this as a key to putting forth a new feminists agenda in “Foucault's Body Language” (1989).

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976) 11

⁷⁰ In *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* (1984), Michel Foucault details the Greco-Roman view of sexuality. This reveals sexuality as not timeless. Their system problematized sexuality through aesthetics and stylization. It was not based on banning acts, desires, or enforcing strict rules. The subject modified and negotiated urges based on their needs and feelings. There was no sexuality, only the management of one's uses of pleasure through moderation; an unethical person had no control over their pleasure forces. The holding back of pleasure was

(heterosexual monogamous marriage, which helped reproduce norms and serve the nations need for increased population) and the illicit. Sexuality became managed through the rational-scientific medical, psychiatric, and criminal justice discourses.⁷¹ They overlap each other to produce desire through regulatory practices and within individuals.⁷² Four major discourses emerged and became the nation-state's concern: the hysterization of women's bodies, the policing of children's sex, the socialization of procreative behavior, and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure. They shape how people see their bodies, experience pleasure, and cause subjects to survey themselves and others for sexual deviation. Subjects learn to confess in order to maintain a clean subjectivity and police their actions, creating more manageable subjects.

Despite the seemingly totalizing system, subjects can practice sexual practices condemned and silenced. However, there is no outside of power or discourse. Power and its forms are never stable. Power is everywhere and it never has a singular origin; it is produced within each moment. It is not shared equally, but cannot be monopolized by one person or group. All subjects exert power within their social space; their power's impact will most likely be lesser than social institutions'. For example, Foucault writes that same-sex-sexual relations existed for centuries; it was an act, not a defining characteristic. By condemning sodomy as perverse, institutions and the State produced homosexuality as an identity core and created a language and

done to get the greatest possible satisfaction and not ruin one's status. Pleasure one had with one's own sex and the opposite sex were not the outcomes of two types of desires, but the same. Life was mastering the art of living.

In *The History of Sexuality: Care of Self (1984)*, Foucault documents a change within the Greco-Roman view. In the second century, Artemidorus wrote *The Interpretation of Dream* as a manual for citizens to read their dreams and understand their state of being. The confession is present; not to condemn what is done, but what has been dreamt. Losing control in dreams reveals a weak and unethical future social life. This causes a rising mistrust of pleasure. From this growing body of literature, Christians constructed ethical thought and religious laws. Denying pleasure was key to self-respect; this was a rule, not a cultivation of self. Sexuality became a corrupting agent and forms of sexuality were condemned.

⁷¹ In *Eroticism (1957)*, Georges Bataille makes a similar claim in his study of eroticism (one aspect of humanity's inner life) and its attempt to conquer the discontinuous of subject's being. Scientific studies treat sexuality as external and not internal. Sexuality is created outside of human subjectivity.

⁷² Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure (1984)*

a reason for homosexuals to counter the discourses produced against them.⁷³ From here, Foucault establishes a political project. He argues that homosexuals should not claim this identity as essential, but use it as a position to invent, multiply, and reshape relations to find new ways of pleasure.⁷⁴ A prescriptive homosexual agenda, such as the liberalization of sex laws, would limit the possibilities for invention. Altering laws may not end discrimination or the limiting of possibilities within social institutions. Instead of working within the institutions that seek to limit, homosexuals should attempt to make living a form of art. The homosexual position should be a consciousness towards the positive creation of more relational possibilities and choices. This way of being rejects the search or revealing of a true self, but instills the constant and active creation of self.⁷⁵

Despite the Jeffrey's stance against Foucault because of his phallo-centrism, many feminists found his work inspiring. Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby connect feminism and Foucault to create dialogical descriptions of women's lives that dismisses essentialism. They see the body as the site where subjects produce and are produced by power and knowledge.⁷⁶ Diamond and Quinby argue that feminism is a reverse discourse existing within society's parameters, but altering how bodies are disciplined. Feminism provides a genealogy of masculine and authoritarian power, an absence within Foucault's work.⁷⁷ Frances Bartkowski, Caroline Ramazanoglu, Janet Holland, Jean Grimshaw, Maureen McNeil, and Lois McNay

⁷³ In *Eroticism (1957)*, Georges Bataille similarly writes about how the creation of taboos creates transgression. The transgressing of a taboo does not deny its existence but completes it.

⁷⁴ Desire is not the route to follow; pleasure is.

⁷⁵ Michel Foucault "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity" (1984) "The Triumph of the Sexual Will" (1982), "Friendship as a Way of Life" (1981), and "Sexual Choice, Sexual Acts" (1982-3)

⁷⁶ In "Apologia for Academic Radicals" (1989) and "Foucault on Modern Power" (1989), Nancy Fraser argues that Foucault reveals the beginning of modern power's deployment through bodies, which is a more productive conversation than the functionalist model of understanding how systems reproduce themselves.

⁷⁷ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby *Feminism & Foucault* (1988)

critique Foucault for not discussing power as gendered and used explicitly against women's bodies and sexualities.

Opposing these critiques, Sandra Lee Bartky, Susan Bordo, and Carol Smart⁷⁸ discuss and elaborate on his theory of power to detail the numerous ways in which the female body and sexuality is disciplined.⁷⁹ Bordo discusses how women consciously conform to feminine body ideals for their own gain and pleasure; sexual liberation and freedom may just be an “obsessively cultivated sexual style.”⁸⁰ Interestingly, Bartkowski praises Foucault's male-centric theory because it details the unnaturalness of masculine sexuality,⁸¹ a subject rarely discussed. Foucault complicates the power men have over women; oppression and bodies are built on multiple expressions of power, not as being produced by one power source.⁸² By studying expressions, feminists can understand the complex and multiple patriarchal relations that produce women and men. This replaces the demonizing of an abstract patriarchy and shows men as also produced by patriarchal relations.⁸³

Diamond, Quinby, Grimshaw, Ramazanoglu, and McNay use Foucault to challenge feminist politics that see sexuality as only political, are anti-pornography, and create a feminist

⁷⁸ Carol Smart's essay differs from the other two because she combines Judith Butler's poststructuralist work on the bodies' social construction with Foucault's theory of disciplinary discourses that shape bodies and sexualities. Her research documents the medical and legal discourses deployed by the nation-state to manage bio-power.

⁷⁹ Frances Bartkowski “Epistemic Drift in Foucault” (1988), Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland “Women's Sexuality and Men's Appropriation of Desire” (1993), Jean Grimshaw “Practices of Freedom” (1993), Maureen McNeil “Dancing with Foucault” (1993), Lois McNay *Feminism and Foucault* (1993), Sandra Lee Bartky “Foucault, Feminism, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,” Susan Bordo “Anorexia Nervosa” (1985) and “Feminism, Foucault and the Politics of the Body” (1988), and Carol Smart “Disruptive Bodies and Unruly Sex” (1992)

⁸⁰ Susan Bordo “Anorexia Nervosa” (1984) 109

⁸¹ Jean Grimshaw argues that his strict masculine focus creates a masculine ethics that cannot consider women's oppression.

⁸² In “Foucault, Feminism, and Feeling” (1993), Maureen Cain acknowledges this as a powerful concept, which can shape how feminists understand knowledge and power. She wants feminism to move beyond the speak-able and explore a theorization of feelings that have no discourse.

⁸³ In “Productive Contradictions” (1993), Kate Soper argues against the idea that bodies are simply discourse produced and that power has no “real” source. Foucault's stance does not explain the systemic oppression of women. Soper does see Foucault as useful in questioning liberation and oppression.

politics centered on a universal ethics.⁸⁴ They embrace an ethics that pushes for empowerment, while realizing the system's limits on agency.⁸⁵ Jana Sawicki details these limits when detailing how Foucauldian theory is not against identity politics as a position, but against seeking or claiming the truth from identity.⁸⁶ Identities should be used until they compromise or constrain the individual or no longer serve the person of rejecting norms or universal claims.⁸⁷ Nancy Fraser interjects that Foucault never, but feminists should, establishes criteria for unacceptable and acceptable uses of power. Fraser argues Foucault's theories at their best provide a basis for questioning a political project's assumptions surrounding power. At their worst, the lack of an agenda causes political paralysis.⁸⁸ Paralysis is what Janet Ransom and Lois McNay believe an adherence to Foucault's work would do to the feminist movement. The multiplicity that must be accounted for in a non-universal approach would fracture the feminist movement to the point of having no core concern.⁸⁹ Jana Sawicki sees this as a strength of Foucault's theory. By not establishing a definite political project, he refuses to speak for the other or to gloss over particularities. His theory allows for the destabilization of current concepts, creating a space to resist.⁹⁰ Bartkowski suggests that Foucault does have an agenda; he approaches an ethics of reciprocity in his discussion of cyclical and equilibrium sexuality through taking pleasure and

⁸⁴ M. E. Bailey makes the same claim against biologic-essentialist feminists in her essay "Foucauldian Feminism" (1993). She uses Foucault to dismiss a monolithic patriarchy as the power-bearer.

⁸⁵ Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby *Feminism & Foucault* (1988), Jean Grimshaw "Practices of Freedom" (1993), Caroline Ramazanoglu "Introduction" (1993), and Lois McNay *Feminism and Foucault* (1993)

⁸⁶ This verification of identity politics through Foucault brings up the interesting issue of what happens when part of the debate over sexuality is a debate over a fidelity to the true Foucault. In an attempt to counter the use of Foucault as a basis for an orthodoxy, David Halperin argues that Foucault's writings draw attention to the social and discursive conditions that shape a subject's desire; Foucault's writings should not be the basis for a totalizing theory, but an example of solid research that continually and never hinders questioning (David Halperin "Forgetting Foucault" (1998)).

⁸⁷ Jana Sawicki *Disciplining Foucault* (1991)

⁸⁸ Nancy Fraser "Foucault's Body Language" (1989)

⁸⁹ Janet Ransom "Feminism, Difference and Discourse" (1993) and Lois McNay *Foucault and Feminism* (1993)

⁹⁰ Jana Sawicki *Disciplining Foucault* (1991)

maintaining self in *Uses of Pleasure and Care of Self* (1984); this refutes an erotics based off power differentiation.⁹¹

Gay and Lesbian Social Constructionists

Feminist social constructionists⁹² in and out of conversation with Foucault spurred an interest in tracing the history/genealogy of homosexuality. George Chauncey, Jr., Martin Duberman, and Martha Vinicus introduce the anthology *Hidden From History* (1989) by arguing that creating a gay and lesbian history is a political project. To affirm a past is to create a justification, trajectory, and tradition of homosexual existence and community.⁹³ They stipulate that claiming historic figures as homosexuals dehistoricizes the meanings and contexts of people's behaviors and provides little to no understanding of their culture.⁹⁴ The importance of creating an account of past sexual behaviors demonstrates that personal behaviors such as sexuality are public matters positioned and manipulated by cultural and political forces.⁹⁵

Randolph Trumbach creates such an account in his work on seventeenth and eighteenth century England's "mollies." Before this movement, society accepted men who had sex with women and

⁹¹ In "Foucault's Body Language," Nancy Fraser argues against reciprocity-based ethics. She does so because Foucault rejects humanist ideals as domination within the power/knowledge regime. Subjects are derivative and have no core. Therefore there can be no grounds for universal rights or a system of reciprocity. Subjects are limited by the system.

⁹² Following Foucault, feminist Mary McIntosh was a key influence on numerous scholars in this field. She writes that the current categorization of sexualities is a historical phenomenon and applying them to the past erases other culture's understanding and construction of sexuality (Mary McIntosh "The Homosexual Role" (1968))

⁹³ David Halperin claims that identifying with past people who engaged in same-sex sexual acts can help political, personal, and theoretical interventions. The recognition of their difference in identity construction should not stop identification (David Halperin "In Defense of Historicism" (2002)).

⁹⁴ Their primary example is A.L. Rowse's *Homosexuals in History* (1997). Rowse finds any hint of homoaffection or same-sex sexual behaviors in famous historical figures from the medieval period to the twentieth century and labels them homosexuals. A positive example of this can be seen in Issac Julien's *Looking for Langston* (1998). This film reclaims Langston Hughes as gay black male voice and establishes the Harlem Renaissance as central to black gay culture. Julien shows the erasure of their experience is partially due to their perceived threat to the black movement, who perceived them as committing a "sin against the race" and white men, who saw looked to reinforce masculinity and racial hierarchies through suppressing homosexuals and black intellectuals and artists. Julien successfully shows these men as desiring bodies, not just historical figures.

⁹⁵ George Chauncey, Jr., Martin Duberman, and Martha Vinicus "Introduction" (1989)

younger men and only persecuted same-sex relations between adult males.⁹⁶ A shift towards more egalitarian gender norms created a strengthening of the boundary between men and women. Men who committed same-sex sexual acts were now rejected from masculinity; they became “mollies.” The subculture’s creation blocked same-sex sexual relations between most men. Trumbach argues that the molly subculture is similar to England’s modern homosexual subculture. The systemic oppression of homosexuals’ longevity and the exceeding amount of historical material on regulating and discussing sexuality leads Trumbach to theorize that sexuality is more fundamental to human history than class.⁹⁷

John Boswell details the long and ongoing presence and sporadic tolerance and celebration of homosexuals in Western culture.⁹⁸ His work demonstrates homosexuality as not antithetical to Christianity, the family, and numerous other social institutions. He uses the past to reveal contradictions within current conservative rhetoric and prove that homosexuals have always existed and are not a modern aberration.⁹⁹ The transhistoric view of homosexuality caused critics such as Jeffrey Weeks and Jonathan Katz to claim that Boswell is an essentialist. An essentialist view marks people “homosexual” who did not consider themselves homosexuals. It places contemporary categories of sexuality over the other historical epochs’. Boswell intervenes by claiming that he is not an essentialist and that neither essentialism nor social constructionists are correct. Instead, “the truth” lies somewhere between. Boswell argues that homosexuals have always existed. They were not called homosexuals in all historical instances. However, subjects living within that epoch could differentiate between people who committed

⁹⁶ He argues that non-Western cultures created spaces for same-sex affectionate people. That is before the Western world invaded and dominated their cultures, turning them against their own tradition of same-sex relations.

⁹⁷ Randolph Trumbach “The Birth of the Queen” (1990) and “London’s Sodomites” (1977)

⁹⁸ Similarly, George Chauncey reveals the US’s shifting tolerance and intolerance of gay culture by documenting the rise and destruction (after WWII) of early twentieth century’s working-class men’s tradition of having sex with men without complicating or corrupting one’s identity (George Chauncey *Gay New York* (1994))

⁹⁹ John Boswell *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980)

homosexual acts and those who did not. Boswell argues that the essentialist/constructionist disagreement must cease because there is a political need to establish homosexuals as continually present to reaffirm the current sexual communities right to exist.¹⁰⁰

In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1992), Lillian Faderman historicizes the existence of intimate relations between women from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1980s. She begins by discussing “romantic friendships,” which were allowed and encouraged as long as the couple did not transgress patriarchal norms.¹⁰¹ Faderman theorizes that these relations were not sexual, but long-term intimate asexual relations.¹⁰² These relations changed when economic, psychological, or cultural expectations shifted. The medical terms “female homosexual” and “lesbian” stopped this tradition of relating. Norms demanded women account for and label their now atypical couplings.¹⁰³ Women had to claim their sexuality under this new regime, while in the past they did not have to name it. Faderman interestingly claims that women who have sex with women and did not claim to be lesbians were not lesbians. Lesbians are women who may or may not sleep with women, but engage with women and critique patriarchy. Being a lesbian is a

¹⁰⁰ It seems that this whole argument could be resolved through a change in vocabulary. Theorists could easily claim that same-sex affection, desire, or sexual behaviors always existed. Claiming that homosexuals, as an identity, have always existed is unnecessary and erroneous. In the postscript of “Revolutions, Universals and Sexual Categories” (1990), Boswell makes this argument and distinction. However, he still claims that these people are “gay.” David Halperin in critiquing his book *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (1990) also argues that when examining the past, historians could say “same-sex contact” or use more descriptive terms to avoid the complexities of identity. He recognizes transhistorical continuities between people engaging in homoaffection and claims that this is not essentialism, but genealogical (David Halperin “In Defense of Historicism” (2002) and “How to do a History of Male Homosexuality” (2000)).

¹⁰¹ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg produced a foundation study of these relations in her article “The Female World of Love and Ritual” (1986). She argues that during the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth century, middle-class white US women were encouraged through societal structures to engage in long-term romantic affect and physical relations. Rosenberg argues that societal and cultural norms created and encouraged this form; it was not a biological trait. Sheila Jeffreys replicates Rosenberg’s argument through a similar historical work, while Lillian Faderman extends this argument to women romantic friendships from the renaissance to the nineteenth century. Faderman argues that these women were lesbians; she uses Adrienne Rich’s model of lesbianism as a continuum (Sheila Jeffreys “Women’s Friendship and Lesbianism” (1996) and Lillian Faderman *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981)).

¹⁰² Michel Foucault argues that Faderman shows how women used power within their situation to create this space and new relationality. He believes this confirms his theory of power and counter-discourses (Michel Foucault “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity” (1984)).

¹⁰³ This discussion of the regulation of bodies is similar to Foucault’s.

declarative act.¹⁰⁴ A definitional change of same-sex relations alters how those committing homoaffection changes their self-perception and lived experience.¹⁰⁵

John D’Emilio argues that gays and lesbians create myths of historical silence and isolation¹⁰⁶ and continual presence. The first myth impacts gay and lesbian politics by seeing coming out as the primary strategy to defeat the failings of the past. This reduces systemic homophobia and heterosexism’s power to silencing. The second myth denies gay men and lesbians as a historical product of capitalism’s emergence. Capitalism destroyed the family’s self-sufficiency and turned them into affective units and personal spaces. People left their families, moved to industrial capitals, and became financially independent. Some formed personal lives around their same-sex desires. This created the potential for a homosexual community and identity.¹⁰⁷ Institutions blame homosexuals and feminists for undermining the families’ strength, despite capitalism’s major contribution to it. D’Emilio argues that it is now easier for people to choose who they desire. This ability to choose should be the driving force of

¹⁰⁴ Lillian Faderman *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1992)

¹⁰⁵ In “Discourses of Sexuality and Subjectivity” (1989), Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues similarly that sexologists labeled and subsequently affected the growing population of independent, middle-class, and same-sex affectionate women as inverts. The generation after this group rejected sexologists’ definitions and created a reverse discourse to establish inverts as sexual and not asexual.

¹⁰⁶ John D’Emilio, Brett Beemyn, David Johnson, and George Chauncey address the current gay and lesbian community’s erasure of all homosexual-life before the Stonewall riots. This erasure does not appear to be intentional, but rather an over-emphasis on and lack of understanding about gays and lesbians before the Stonewall Riots. They argue against the image of a sad isolated gay man, who believed himself to be sick, by showing the existence of a lively culture flourishing gay culture before Stonewall (John D’Emilio *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* (1983), Brett Beemyn “Introduction” (1997), David Johnson “The Kids of Fairy Town” (1997) and George Chauncey *Gay New York* (1994)). An example of this erasure is when Joseph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson introduce their edited volume on activism by placing the riots at the beginning of the gay and lesbians movement (Bristow and Wilson “Introduction” (1993)). By doing this, they make the movement appear dramatically, instead of being a process that evolved out of the rise of capitalism, homosocial war times, rise of urbanization, end of McCarthy politics, and loosening of sexual norms. Additionally, this erases the early homophile movement’s word. Steven Seidman similarly rejects the generation division. He instead divides those debating sexuality as belonging to either “liberationists” or “romanticists.” Both sides are too extreme. Seidman creates a sexual ethic that recognizes and promotes sexual diversity, but also creates standards of sexual consent and social responsibility. This ethic allows for the critical analysis of sexualities that may harm or create inequalities (Steven Seidman *Embattled Eros* (1992)).

¹⁰⁷ D’Emilio does mention that homosexual behavior existed before this, but a homosexual identity did not. In *Queer Geography* (1996), Frank Browning also claims that capitalism and urbanization created gayness, but adds that gay as an identity is particular to the United States.

the gay and lesbian movement because it challenges and threatens the heterosexist institutions. The model based off an essential or coming out strategy does not threaten these institutions because it creates an oppressed and isolated class.¹⁰⁸

As part of the debate between gay and lesbian social constructionists and essentialists,¹⁰⁹ David Halperin reports how Ancient Greek's discussed sexuality to illustrate the past existence of radical alternatives and experiences of sexuality and subjectivity. Halperin's goal was to completely divorce Greek pederasty with contemporary homosexuality to show gender-object choice as a radically new way of identifying sexuality. This movement denaturalizes heterosexuality.¹¹⁰ His argument was not Foucaudian, but social constructionist; it searches for the origins and truth within historical evidence. He marks a clear break between same-sex behaviors occurring pre- and post-end of the nineteenth century; this is when homosexuality as we know it was born.¹¹¹ He later critiques his work through Foucault's process of creating genealogies rather than histories. Genealogies destabilize linear causality and avoid the condemnation of those who replicate older models of same-sex affections.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ John D'Emilio "Capitalism and Gay Identity" (1983)

¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, few gay and lesbian scholars claim to be essentialists, although the lesbian theorists who claim lesbianism as the natural state of women and heterosexuality to be a patriarchal imposition fall into this category. The only people I found discussing an essential male homosexuality were geneticists. Dean Hamer, Peter Copeland and Simon LeVay claim that a person's genetics make them homosexual. LeVay asserts that he has also found the gene, which determines a person's desired frequency of sex (Dean Hamer and Peter Copeland *The Science of Desire* (1995) and Simon LeVay *The Sexual Brain* (1994)).

Roger Lancaster writes that essentialist/ sociobiologist accounts of human nature, sex, and sexuality come from the media and "common knowledge" and are heteronormative. Lancaster argues for a social constructionist theory of sexuality that allows desire to be volatile and cross identity boundaries (Roger Lancaster *The Trouble with Nature* 2003). Anne Fausto-Sterling writes that sex is more complicated than male/female; this categorization is social. Similarly, sexuality is socially described and limited by language. The material body does impact human sexuality, however, biology needs to move beyond simple causality and explore the cultural, social, and biological factors that create a complicated sexual being (Anne Fausto-Sterling *Sexing the Body* 2000).

¹¹⁰ David Halperin *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (1990)

¹¹¹ Eve Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) criticizes this severe break as creating a simple and linear history of sexuality. Sedgwick argues that past forms of sexuality constantly surface. Halperin argues with her and adjusts his theory, but wishes to examine why it is that past forms of sexuality reappear or never diffuse. (See "In Defense of Historicism" (20002))

¹¹² David Halperin "In Defense of Historicism" (2002)

David Halperin theorizes that Foucault's rise in gay and lesbian scholarship was due to the AIDS crisis and its revealing of sexual politics' power. Foucault's concept of power was not nihilistic to AIDS activists because it was not omnipotent and distant, but exercised and relational. This meant activists had power, especially against liberal power, which sought to normalize and cultivate, not dominate. Halperin explains Foucault's dismissal of sexual revolutions was due to their engagement with liberal power and distorting freedom. They demanded and created new norms and forms that subjects must follow to be free; freedom is dictated. Instead of creating new prescriptions, Foucault argues that subjects possess power and should refuse norms and create new processes and possibilities. Opposition is not freedom, but resistance. Halperin argues that people should claim identities without an essence to avoid knowledge production about self. Homosexual is defined as object-choice based, while queer is an unstable unknown; it has no essence.¹¹³ Subjects should become strange through self-fashioning and seeking pleasure.¹¹⁴ Foucault never provides a theory of sexuality, but instead a drive to examine how sexual identity and acts were created and the conditions and discourse in which they were construed.¹¹⁵ He uses Foucault and writes that sexuality lies not within the body, but within subjectivities; subjects do not exist outside discursive practices. This does not mean that academics should reduce subject formation to discourses alone. Instead they should position the body as the site of resistance.¹¹⁶

Jeffrey Weeks's work is similar to Foucault's, however he sees Foucault as trapping and determining the body within discourses, while essentializing the body as pleasure based.¹¹⁷ Like

¹¹³This point is reiterated by Jeffrey Weeks in "Uses and Abuses of Michel Foucault" (1991).

¹¹⁴ David Halperin *Saint Foucault and "In Defense of Historicism"* (2002)

¹¹⁵ David Halperin "Forgetting Foucault" (1998) and "How to do a History of Male Homosexuality" (2000)

¹¹⁶ David Halperin "Historicizing the Subject of Desire" (1992)

¹¹⁷ It makes it clear that although his work seems like a derivative of Foucault's work because it traces the historical production of sexuality via power expression, but it was written before Foucault's work was published. He charges

Foucault, he argues that discourses are divergent expressions of power that produce normative sexuality and cause subjects to see their sexuality as their truth. He sees desire as having more potential avenues than the system allows.¹¹⁸ Weeks argues that to understand the production of sexual kinship,¹¹⁹ the economic and social context, social regulation through formal and informal relations, political climate, and the cultures of resistance in existence must be understood.¹²⁰ Variance within the system shows the lack of a uniform sexuality and dominant discourse and illustrates subjects' self-creation, excess of desire, and active resistance. He endorses a politics of sexual radicalism, which intervenes in sexual norms and creates more ways of discussing sexuality.¹²¹ Democratizing desire is connected to the larger project of democratizing contemporary culture on all fronts.¹²² Later, Weeks's project moves closer to Foucault's; he advocates a new morality, which constantly seeks different desires, beliefs, and norms.¹²³ Interestingly, Weeks sees identity as a political choice. To label yourself gay does not just define your desire; one can desire men, but choose not to be gay. Declaring oneself gay demonstrates an allegiance to a social construct. This is an alteration of the Second Wave feminist stance that sexual identity is political because it does not mandate desire or a politics nor declares homosexuality as natural and heterosexuality as a constructed prison. Instead, through self-definition subjects decide whether or not they are gay or lesbian. This reinforces his concept that

that Foucault's work lacks implication because he provides no room for alternatives. This is an incorrect reading; Foucault does allow for alternatives, just not freedom.

¹¹⁸ Jeffery Weeks "Questions of Identity" (1991)

This concept is borrowed from psychoanalysis. In "Questions of Identity" (1991) and "Against Nature" (1991), Weeks describes Freud as providing "a non-essentialist theory of identity" (76).

¹¹⁹ He sees Juliet Mitchell's psychoanalytic work *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974) as showing how kinship shapes sexuality. Although her ahistoricism does not help create a political project. For Weeks, doing a history is political; it helps understand how cultures' organize and define subjects through expressions of power.

¹²⁰ Barry D. Adam follows Weeks' assertion and provides a social constructions account of the conditions that allowed a gay and lesbian movements from Medieval era to the 1990s (Barry D. Adam *The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (1995) and "Structural Foundations of the Gay World" (1996)).

¹²¹ Jeffrey Weeks *Sex, Politics & Society* (1989) and "Writing About Sexuality" (1991)

¹²² This should not be an authoritarian movement, but a movement that reflects the particularities of subjects and collectives needs and desires as felt, not prescribed.

¹²³ Jeffrey Weeks "Discourse, Desire, and Sexual Deviance" (1991) and *Sexuality and its Discontents* (1985)

subject can and do actively create themselves within the current limiting identity expression.¹²⁴ Weeks argues that this activity can create “elective communities” which form new social and political identifications to suit their needs.¹²⁵ This ethics is based off subjects’ free and equal ability to shape their lives, as long as it does not negate other people’s rights. Weeks seeks a politics where numerous collectives shape a larger community that recognizes difference.¹²⁶ He reiterates Foucault’s position that we must not seek who we are, but “refuse what we are” and explore the ontological vicissitudes of identity rather than simply falling into a universal ethical ideal.¹²⁷

AIDS

Dennis Altman wrote about the AIDS epidemic soon after it began. His work shows the emotion, urgency, and uncertainty within the gay and lesbian community and academia.¹²⁸ The need for sexual minorities to engage with the government and change public policy was no

¹²⁴ Jeffrey Weeks “Questions of Identity” (1991)

¹²⁵ Jeffrey Weeks “Against Nature” and *Sexuality and its Discontents* (1985)

In “Questions of Identity” (1991), he reasons that GLB people become preoccupied and form communities around their sexual identity because it allows an avenue to resist society’s invalidation of their lives.

¹²⁶ Jeffrey Weeks “The Value of Difference” (1991)

¹²⁷ Jeffrey Weeks “Uses and Abuses of Michel Foucault” (1991) 168

¹²⁸ The emotion, urgency, and uncertainty created by the AIDS epidemic created a need to document the fleeting lives of those infected. This material allows either the subjects or their loved-one the chance to process what is occurring or occurred and to explain what AIDS does to the subject’s mind and body. Jamaica Kincaid shows the AIDS patient not as a victim, but as a person who has a disease that has been stigmatized through its connection to sex. She describes AIDS as not just a medical illness, but as the altering of a body into the abject and the loss it creates (Jamaica Kincaid *My Brother* (1998)). *Silverlake Life: The View From Here* (1993) documents the lives of a couple living with AIDS. The couple give a startling account of how AIDS produces a different perspective by removing them from the everyday, something that their gay identity also did. Making them more of observers than participants while making them extremely aware of the limits of their bodies and heightens the bonds or lack of bonds existing. Gary Fisher’s earlier writings provide a raw account of homophobia, racism, and the intersections of race and sexuality. After he discovers he is HIV-positive and develops Kaposi’s sarcoma, he becomes obsessed with his new skin, his new identity. This stigma alters his prose. His body, his disease, his death become the focus of his writing. His sexuality, his blackness, his desire go away because of shame. Fisher’s work reveals how shame overtakes a subject and the sense of urgency that occurs in a person diagnosed with HIV (Gary Fisher *Gary in Your Pocket* (1996)).

longer a theoretical argument, but an urgency. This urgency mixed with grief brought the GLBT movement together and solidified a sense of community.¹²⁹ Apolitical people became political. Gay and lesbian politics shifted from being centered on rights to the issues of need and resource allocation.¹³⁰ When the government ignored their pleas and did not respond, they organized and created social, political, and medical institutions to comfort, care for, and aid those affected.¹³¹ The lack of government response revealed the structural inequalities created by the Reagan Administration's destruction of the welfare state, the rising cost of healthcare, and the social conservative backlash that valorized heteronormativity.¹³² This conservatism infected the medical community; they discussed homosexuality and promiscuity as the cause of the disease, ushering in the remedicalization of sexuality.¹³³ Bersani argues that AIDS not only allows for the remedicalization of sexuality, but also an increase and justification for homophobia. AIDS discourse impacted policies, which sought to protect heterosexuals from the already dead and abject homosexuals. The condemnation and linking of homosexuality to AIDS is tied to sexual hierarchies, which causes the hatred of the "feminine-passive" position during anal sex (the position that abdicates masculine power). Gay men should reject medical discourse and hold

¹²⁹ Jeffrey Weeks writes that all current GLBT scholarship is done in the shadow of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The epidemic reinforced and revealed inequalities and prejudices against marginal racial and sexual communities and at the same time strengthened communal ties (Jeffrey Weeks "Male Homosexuality in the Age of AIDS" (1991) and "AIDS" (1991)). Pat Califia wants to stop the movement's continual focus on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The multiple-front movement only interest lies in curing AIDS. While AIDS is an important issue, Califia wants pleasure, sexuality, and the overturning of sodomy laws to be on the movement's agenda (Pat Califia *Public Sex* (1994)).

¹³⁰ Dennis Altman *AIDS in the Mind of America* (1986)

¹³¹ Simon Watney writes similarly that British activists broke away from identity rights to getting funding for AIDS education and prevention targeted at gay men. He argues that this population was ignored and programs that did target this group were underfunded. This is why AIDS still wreaks havoc in gay populations, while intravenous drug users infection rate drops (Simon Watney *Imagine Hope* (2000)).

From 1990-92, ACT UP Los Angeles and Queer Nation LA created not-a-physical, but a social infrastructure to serve as a social safety net to care for and aid those with AIDS (Ty Geltmaker "The Queer Nation Acts Up" (1997)).

¹³² Lisa Duggan comments the gay movement shift to the right exacerbates Reaganite initiatives to defund healthcare and increase funding for prisons and police. The gay movement argues that the policing of gay sex will end the promiscuity that causes AIDS ("Prologue" (1996)).

¹³³ Dennis Altman *AIDS in the Mind of America* (1986)

onto their sexual patterns that reject the masculine and feminine roles of heterosexuality and trap subjects into only experiencing power or powerlessness. Powerlessness must be seen as attractive.¹³⁴

Cindy Patton and Paula A. Treichler examine the discursive use of AIDS in an attempt to understand how structures of power use “AIDS” to further marginalize, control, and kill subjects. They show how science’s language constructs reality, affects policy decisions, and alters subjectivity. Patton claims that AIDS is used to validate the unnaturalness of marked bodies. Science and silence once again are being used to dominate homosexuals via destruction and illness. AIDS revealed sexuality as private for normative people, while public for those abjected.¹³⁵ The HIV-test became the modern confession revealing the sins, weakness, and wrongness of some subjects. Science never revealed “the truth” of HIV/AIDS but builds upon oppression. Patton argues that commemoration should not be the sole act of activists. Massive demonstrations should display the death and harm being done, to force those committing wrongs to change their politics.¹³⁶ Treichler argues that the initial demarcation of AIDS as the “gay disease” created the idea that the “gay lifestyle” causes the disease.¹³⁷ This illusion continues as politicians and scientists blame promiscuity, public sex, and forms of sex for the spread of HIV. Through mapping the discourse, she demonstrates the permeability existing between popular, media, science, and policy discourses. This is not to say that AIDS is a discourse disease, but a

¹³⁴ Leo Bersani “Is the Rectum the Grave?” (1987)

¹³⁵ Simon Watney in *Imagine Hope* (2000) makes the same claim.

¹³⁶ Cindy Patton *Inventing AIDS* (1990)

¹³⁷ Douglas Crimp argues that finding useful or honest information about HIV prevention is difficult. He cites the widely discussed promiscuity as a risky behavior as one of the many false facts. Crimp argues that gay men have aided the government in spreading this information and condemning/blaming the gay community for the AIDS epidemic. They call for heterosexual forms of monogamy and marriage-like relations to be embraced (Douglas Crimp “How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic” (1987)).

material disease whose understanding and treatment is severely impacted by discourse. She argues for a compassion and care based activism to overcome discriminatory language.¹³⁸

Within the AIDS response, academics, activists and health professions create numerous policies, practices, or theories of AIDS that did not take into account the actual lives of gay men. HIV changed gay men's sexual activities and their meanings, including those not living with HIV. Many are sexually frustrated by the regimes and uncertainty of what constitutes safe sex. Most men try to severely limit the sexual acts they perform with other men.¹³⁹ However, desire and passion sometimes negate their knowledge of safe sex causing subjects to commit "unsafe" acts. This reveals that safe sex is not achieved but an ongoing process. This process could be more successful and gay men would be more sexually satisfied if sex educators and health professions provided detailed explanations and lists of what was safe/unsafe and why they are categorized in this manner. This would broaden the activities gay men currently perform, allowing them not to feel sexually stifled. This does not negate the power of desire, but allows for more outlets.¹⁴⁰

Rosalind Coward's perspective on the HIV epidemic is unique; she argues that although disturbing to think about, this epidemic creates a moment to re-arrange heterosexual sex acts into a more egalitarian form. Penetration has long been discussed as non-pleasurable for women and safe sex has always been the women's concern. Heterosexual men being cautious about HIV infection alters this. This creates moments for alternatives to penetration to be explored, allowing

¹³⁸ Paula A. Treichler *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* (1999)

¹³⁹ Dangerous Bedfellows and Stephen Gendin reiterate this sentiment and call for HIV prevention that includes desire and sexuality. Dangerous Bedfellows argue that public sex spaces create spaces for safe sex education. The destruction of public sex institutions for the sake of public health creates the illusion that public sex leads to HIV infection. Gendin argues that safe sex practices are hard to maintain if they hinder and frustrated the desires of gay men (Dangerous Bedfellows "Introduction" (1996) and Stephen Gendin "I Was a Teenage HIV Prevention Activist" (1996)). Isaac Julien provides an emotional response to the loss of sexual pleasure, desire, and connection that occurred after the AIDS epidemic started. He describes the death of public sex and fear of strangers' bodies as the death of a culture and a way of feeling (Isaac Julien *Looking for Langston*(1998).

¹⁴⁰ Gary W. Dowsett *Practicing Desire* (1996)

women a chance to explain what is pleasurable to them. The atrocity of an epidemic horror could positively alter and challenge dominant forms of sexuality.¹⁴¹ Coward's argument is fruitful for numerous reasons. The AIDS epidemic cannot be allowed to destroy or hinder desire or pleasure. While deadly, it opens up a space for alternative sexual practices, outside of penetration, to be explored and legitimized. Running back into desexualized movement does the work of conservatives. Instead subjects can use this moment, as they already have, to expose sexual hierarchies and queer sex.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is not a single discourse or program. It develops out of gay and lesbian studies and feminism's strive for a political project outside of legislation and after AIDS¹⁴² activists showed the deadliness of normative sexual hierarchies. Queer theory works to create publics to discuss and allow the continual practice of intimacy and sexuality that heteronormative culture prohibits and punishes. It analyzes normative (specifically heteronormativity) production across multiple discourses.¹⁴³ Queer theory works to disrupt and interrogate these discourses, binaries, and the identities they create. It hopes to do this through sustaining counterpublics¹⁴⁴ to create new discourses, practices, or desires. It argues that desire is illegible and multiple and should not be institutionalized and rejects equality as sameness.¹⁴⁵

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick builds a critique of homophobia within feminism because it is patriarchal. She rejects MacKinnon, Jeffreys, and Dworkin's politics due to their prescriptive identities and politics and refusal to engage with meaning and what meaning means. She

¹⁴¹ Rosalind Coward "Sex After AIDS" (1987)

¹⁴² Dangerous Bedfellows also argues that the AIDS epidemic helped usher in queer theory (Dangerous Bedfellows "Introduction" (1996)).

¹⁴³ Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us About X?" (1995)

¹⁴⁴ The concept of a queer counterpublic creates a base for what Foucault would call a "reverse discourse." Foucault might warn that a counterpublic should not become a basis for one's identity, but a position to create more pleasure or experiences in one's life.

¹⁴⁵ Lee Edelman "Queer Theory: Unstating Desire" (1995)

specifically targets MacKinnon's erroneous assumption that every feminine trait connotes women's oppression through sexuality. Language and meaning do reveal sexual power relations, but they are not as simple as MacKinnon suggests. The reader's position matters. She historicizes desire to show how the line between sexual and non-sexual and homosocial and homosexual moves depending on power relations. From the late nineteenth century to the present, this sexual binary formed around sexual-object choice, then structured knowledge and thought, and divided the population into two distinct groups. The actual difference between these groups is unstable and fluctuating. They are not opposites, but a historical relationality fused in defining and contradicting each other. Her work, along with Judith Butler's, moves beyond the essentialist and social constructionist debate by establishing gender and sexuality as performances within cultural contradictions.¹⁴⁶

Sedgwick follows Foucault in claiming that sexuality has been placed as subject's truth. "The closet" manifests through the performance of silence around homosexuals through relations of knowing and unknowing. The homosexual does not go into the closet; society continually builds the closet creating the constant need to either stay closeted or "come out." When the homosexual speaks and reveals his homosexuality, he or she reveals their truth. The silence works to safeguard heterosexual and male privilege by excusing them from knowing the other's position.¹⁴⁷ These silences are produced, alongside the systemic oppression of those who speak. The contradictory system makes sexuality both central and marginal. It determines the subject,

¹⁴⁶ Sedgwick here follows Gayle Rubin's assertion that gender and sexuality, while implicated in each other, are two distinct phenomena.

¹⁴⁷ Michael Signorile documents how "the closet" damages gay men and lesbians in the US. The silence the closet creates and perpetuates a fractured subjectivity in GL people. Signorile believes that activists should "out" closeted public figures to destroy the power of the closet. This action seems to blame the victim for being abject, instead of critiquing the system that has objected him or her (Michael Signorile *Queer in America* (1993)).

demands it speak the truth, then punishes¹⁴⁸ or refuses to hear. The homosexual subject becomes closeted and paralyzed by a system that makes little sense.¹⁴⁹ This closing in on the subject creates the desire to reject and claim difference. She calls this rejection “queer;” it is “a continuing moment, movement, motive” for something different.¹⁵⁰ Sedgwick’s work is important because it connects representation and language to the material through linking ideology and sexuality, while creating spaces for difference via performativity.¹⁵¹

Judith Butler denaturalizes gender and sexual binary categories through Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucault’s theory of regulatory discourses. Butler writes that subjects generate categorical meanings in their everyday lives through signifying practices provided by dominant discourses. These discourses ignore lived gender and sexuality, which is not fully determined, but constituted through discourse.¹⁵² Gender is not determined from sex, but from cultural practices and meanings that define bodies in different ways. Gender is reified through repetition causing heteronormativity to appear natural.¹⁵³ Butler critiques feminism for theorizing the construct “woman” as fixed. This constricts their politics to the possibilities provided by dominant culture. Questioning the connection between gender and sex could create more spaces for possibilities. Butler argues that subjects can intervene at the level of constituting identities. Subjects and theorists must look for alternatives that can be repeated at the site of identity to

¹⁴⁸ In “Queer and Now” (1993) and “How to Bring Your Kid Up Gay” (1991), she writes that gay and lesbian adolescent suicides haunt her writings. The high-rate of suicides is due to society’s hopes that these youth will conform or die.

¹⁴⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Between Men and Epistemology of the Closet* (1985)

¹⁵⁰ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick “Forward” (1993) xii

¹⁵¹ Sedgwick demonstrates the creation of this space in “White Glasses,” an account of her relationship with Michael Lynch and the ability to experience and identify with gay men’s friendship, community, and bonding (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick “White Glasses” (1992)).

¹⁵² Here, Butler relies on a psychoanalytic subject that is never complete and fails at conforming.

¹⁵³ Jeffreys argues that queer theory, in particular Judith Butler, depoliticizes lesbianism; gender within this paradigm loses the material oppression and violence that feminists have brought to light. Instead of being a means of oppression, gender becomes a performance, a part of language that can be played with and altered. Queer ideas of power never connect to real bodies, but instead is an abstract and floating force that denies political action (Shelia Jeffreys *Lesbian Heresy* (1994)).

disrupt and reveal normative acts as constructed. This is possible since the subject always fails to fully conform.¹⁵⁴ Later, Butler reformulates this stance due to critiques that she provides too much agency for subjects; her critics believe her to say the subjects volunteer to perform their gender. In reaction, she emphasizes that sex does not exist in a natural sense. The heterosexual apparatus regulates bodies through the enforced repetition of sexed practices. The process begins before birth and needs to constantly occur because the materialization of sex is never complete or perfect.¹⁵⁵ It is through this heterosexist process that subjectivity is gained. Subjects cannot think of their body outside of heteronormative intelligibility; bodies are intelligible because they cite previous practices.¹⁵⁶

She argues for a collective politics of misidentification where subjects refuse normative categories of being and citizenship. By not identifying with citizenship as it is constructed, Butler hopes subjects can create spaces for more subjects to be recognized and democracy to encompass the lives of more subjects. This destabilization is possible because the materialization of bodies is unstable and cannot fully capture what escapes normative identities of sex (male/female); the contradictions between gender and sexual norms and lived experiences cause volatile boundaries to exist within the societal structure. The always-unstable boundaries create a societal need for the repetition of norms, thus creating a surplus of possible sites of resistance.¹⁵⁷ Feelings and

¹⁵⁴ Judith Butler *Gender Trouble* (1990)

¹⁵⁵ In the same thread as Butler, Elizabeth Grosz displaces the mind and placing the body as central to subjectivity. The mind, consciousness, unconsciousness, discourse, and space are all implicated the body, but do not determine it. There is no distinct border between them, but they are not unified. She writes that the body has an immediate specificity, which can explain, show, or feel differences of identity, desire, sexuality, gender, and race. Bodies are objects that respond, generate, create, and react and are not just acted upon. Within this paradigm, sexuality is more of the body than of the unconscious. Theories of desire and pleasure must centralize and reevaluate bodies as reactive, dynamic, and influential, and not the host of the mind (Elizabeth Grosz *Volatile Bodies* (1994) and “Bodies-Cities” (1996))

¹⁵⁶ Again, Butler relies on Lacan’s idea of language and subjectivity to explain the power of citations, uttering, and materialization of power.

¹⁵⁷ Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter* (1993)

self-understanding constantly push against the constructed limits and exploit the failures.¹⁵⁸ Through exceeding norms, she argues that the “inhuman,” what is outside of the binary, can acknowledge their intelligibility, but then rejects those terms.¹⁵⁹ This action depends on the subject embracing the possibility within queerness. By performing in public, queering subjects can resignify abjection and create legitimate positions from the discarded. This turns the abject into a political space where subjects can transform language by causing others to recognize the abject as worthy of life. This could set off a chain-reaction causing a reevaluation of abjection and disrupt heterosexism.¹⁶⁰ It is because of this that Butler argues for the performative over identity politics; sexuality cannot be contained or explained through categories, so to use them to gain liberation is faulty logic.¹⁶¹ To explain one’s sexuality is to attempt to make it understandable and controllable to external forces.¹⁶²

Lee Edelman argues that the category male homosexual emerges from the articulation of a sexual difference within males; the homosexual can only be recognized after “the homosexual” has been written.¹⁶³ Then homosexual subjects can write their own presence as a homosexual. Edelman argues that speaking as a homosexual leads to an essentialist assimilation position; identities attempt to produce sameness within subjects. Despite this drawback, the articulation of

¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Teresa De Lauretis shows through semiotics that lesbian sexuality has the ability to disrupt normativity. The final chain of the semiotic cycle, the interpretant, causes an affective, intellectual, and energetic response from or within the subject, which, depending on their subject position, can disrupt normative fantasies. From here, the subject can rework representation, desire, and fantasy within their inner world and then resignify it externally through discourse or performance (Teresa De Lauretis *Alice Doesn't* (1984) and *The Practice of Love* (1994)).

¹⁵⁹ In “Doing Justice to Someone” (2001) Judith Butler uses the case of a man who was once a girl who was once an infant boy to discuss the limits of humanity, intelligibility, and subjectivity created by medical and popular discourses.

¹⁶⁰ Judith Butler “Critically Queer” (1993)

¹⁶¹ Although, she understands that people use them as a rallying mechanism and is not entirely against this. Butler wants to complicate and allow those identity categories to be known as always already false.

¹⁶² Judith Butler “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” (1994)

¹⁶³ It is important to note, Edelman writes that officials speak of homosexuality, but refuse to speak of sodomy. The act and articulation of the act disrupts the impenetrability of masculinity to the point that government officials refuse to name it (Lee Edelman “Capital Offenses” (1994)).

a difference within males creates instability in masculinity; it exposes the lack of sameness within gender divisions. Exposing sameness's falsity can cause a cascade allowing for numerous differences to be produced. To stop this, homosexuals are made visible and marked with difference to create the illusion of stability within the gender categories and control homosexuality. This hinders homosexuality's potential to disrupt gender and sexual categories, masculine privilege, and multiply desire, while reaffirming heterosexuality as essentially natural and normative.¹⁶⁴ However, this process does not completely ease society's fear of homosexuality. Institutions and citizens still view of homosexuality as the hidden and possible latent threat within all citizens' bodies. This leads to sensational and instructive (how to spot a homosexual) media representations, the alteration and policing of private-public spaces,¹⁶⁵ and increased heterosexism and homophobia.¹⁶⁶

Shane Phelan discusses the mainstreaming of the gay movement and their rejection of bisexuals, transgender folk, effeminate men, and butch women for the sake of a homonormative image that convinces heterosexuals to allow assimilated gays and lesbians access to full citizenship. The mainstream GLBT movement conceives of citizenship as access to social institutions such as marriage and the military. Phelan argues that inclusion into an unjust and heterosexist system will not solve the problems of sexual minorities, but will offer rights to those willing to act gender normative and live closeted. Additionally, legal protection does not equate full inclusion or participation within life. The inability to show affection in public is one form of exclusion that will not go away if included legally. She proposes that sexual minorities think of themselves as anxiety and fear producing strangers. This allows an understanding of the current

¹⁶⁴ Lee Edelman "Homographesis" (1989)

¹⁶⁵ Dangerous Bedfellows blur the boundaries between private/public sex by arguing that sex in the bedroom is public via law, voyeurism, and media ("Introduction" (1996))

¹⁶⁶ Lee Edelman "Tearoom and Sympathy" (1993)

model of citizenship as strictly heterosexual. Before GLBT citizens fight for inclusion, they must queer citizenship and question the nation through strangeness. This would entail a fight towards justice that does not entail equality through sameness, but the equal treatment of difference.¹⁶⁷

One of the most prominent voices of the assimilating homonormative movement is Andrew Sullivan, author of *Virtually Normal* (1996). Sullivan situates gays as almost normal. He reifies heterosexuality as the normal, natural, and therefore better sexuality, but states that homosexuals should still be allowed to exist. Homosexuality is a slight deviation, which should be accepted because it is a private matter. Once homosexuals abandon their culture and become heterosexual in all manners except object-choice then full-inclusion can be expected. He argues the inclusion of homosexuals in marriage and the military will speed up the process of assimilation. Sullivan not only reifies heterosexuality, but also erases decades of queer chosen-families and claims queer people are morally bankrupt hedonists, unable to nurture each other because they are outside the nuclear family model. Sullivan believes that homosexuality will never be universally accepted, but assimilation allows some semblance of normality.¹⁶⁸ Bruce Bawer echoes Sullivan. He writes that gay and lesbians should seek to be normal and included into mainstream culture. What stops this from happening is gender non-normative people and “radical” gay activists. These people cause heterosexuals to hate, fear, and oppress gays and lesbians. The only way to temper their abnormality and reach equality is through marriage, once this is done full equality and assimilation will occur.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Shane Phelan *Sexual Strangers* (2001)

¹⁶⁸ Andrew Sullivan *Virtually Normal* (1996)

¹⁶⁹ Bruce Bawer *A Place at the Table* (1994)

Diana Fuss and Cindy Patton argue that heterosexual/homosexual binary replicates an inside/outside dichotomy and reinforces hierarchies.¹⁷⁰ Heterosexuality defines itself in opposition to abjected homosexuality. To affirm a homosexual identity is to help reinforce heterosexuality's necessary other and be "understood."¹⁷¹ This binary cannot be ignored, but must be repeatedly challenged and studied because as Butler and Sedgwick write, the challenging of the binary aids in the rejection of the normative, the legitimization of the abject, and the creation of space for difference. The goal should be the disorganization of the structures by creating a theory of marginality that accounts for actual lived experience.¹⁷² Ed Cohen reiterates most of Fuss's points, but charges that the "we" in identity politics erases difference, blocks subjects from revealing contradictions and assimilates subjects to the collective will.¹⁷³ Cohen embraces Butler's concept of politics at the site of performance, but breaks from Butler's use of the body. He believes the body can be the motivation for action, not simply the site of action.¹⁷⁴ The body is the site of affect and emotion, which must be considered when discussing politics. His political call foreshadows the rise of theories of affect within GLBT studies and Queer theory.

Michael Warner also argues against identity political activists' claim that inclusion, assimilation, or lack of open discrimination will eliminate the need of political groups organized around non-normative sexuality. One reason is that shame and estrangement are central to GLBT subjectivity within heterosexist culture and inclusion into such a system only ignores shame.

¹⁷⁰ Michele Aina Barale's "Below the Belt" (1991) demonstrates Fuss's assumption. Her article details how the covers for and content of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) allow heterosexual readers to recognize and consume lesbian sexuality in a fashion that reinforces heterosexuality.

¹⁷¹ This is a more pessimistic version of Foucault's counter discourse.

¹⁷² Diana Fuss "Inside/Out" (1991) and Cindy Patton "Tremble, Hetero Swine!" (1993)

¹⁷³ Cohen sees his work as countering Stephen Epstein's argument that gays and lesbians need to politically unite to fight homophobia and heterosexism. Cohen believes this approach to gays and lesbians wrongly assumes that they all have the same concerns and politics (Steve Epstein "Gay Politics, Ethnic Identity" (1992)).

¹⁷⁴ Cohen does argue that Butler never discusses the danger of reifying new alternatives, does not create a platform for collective practices, and ignored the body.

Additionally, an inclusion-only policy will never completely work because people do not know their desires; how can the unknown be included? To gain inclusion, they exclude. The national gay movement constructs normativity to hide GLBT sex from the heterosexist public. Inclusion allows the identity to be acceptable, but not the acts.¹⁷⁵ Inclusion comes at the expense of numerous GLBT people and legitimizes the state's role in regulating sexuality and the accompanying inequalities. Warner offers queers, a group interested in social justice through questioning constructions of normative and abject, as a retort. Queer theorists and activists show the heterosexual norm is not just within sexuality, but implicated in most institutions and cultural norms.¹⁷⁶ Warner argues for a queer politics that embraces shame, difference, and stigma and makes it positive and communal; queers should live in defiance of straight culture through creating new forms of living and intimacy. Beyond performative destruction, queers need to engage in world making.¹⁷⁷

Michael Warner details this world making in *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005). A public exists by being addressed, allowing a sense of belonging to begin. The dominant public creates a prosthetic space/body that subjects enter to transcend their bodies and engage with culture. This process is utopian because it allows access and the hope for equality, but also dominating because the prosthetic body is composed through dominant identities and social

¹⁷⁵ Eric Clarke documents how the inclusion of homoeroticism in the public sphere progressed to a normative version of homosexuality. This ends discussions surrounding equality or justice and instead demonizes "queer" people who do not conform. Clarke writes that a critique of the public sphere through homoeroticism shows the limits of the public sphere. This does not mean the public sphere and ideals should be discarded, but instead altered and used to show inequalities. This allows a bettering of the public sphere through new moralities and ideals (Eric Clarke *Virtuous Vice* (2000)).

¹⁷⁶ Deborah P. Britzman uses queer theory to expose heterosexism within education and the creation of ignorance and intelligibility within subjects (their students and themselves). Queer theory's attempt to destabilize and ultimately rid culture of normativity, which can and does exclude students and limits what is knowable, can help educators work towards a more just education system. Thinking through these issues could create a more egalitarian pedagogy without relying on liberal methods of inclusion, which allows "others" secondary status and reinforces hierarchies. Instead they question the foundation of education and knowledge and proliferate identifications, and cause misrecognition through reading texts that exceed identity (Deborah P. Britzman "Is There a Queer Pedagogy?" (1995)).

¹⁷⁷ Michael Warner "Introduction" (2005) and *The Trouble with Normal* (1999)

markers. Community is then understood through heterosexuality. A counterpublic, a public marked as subordinate and different from the normative public, can form and interfere to reshape public life and create new spaces for new intimacies.¹⁷⁸ The public is where the defining and redefining of citizen, community, normality, and identity occur. If counterpublics enter the public through mainstream (legal) discourse, and not through their own public spheres, they use the language of their oppressors. This makes them more approachable, but also deradicalizes their discourse. Warner argues that this is the course of the current mainstream GLBT movement. The strength of counterpublics' non-normative discourse is that it wakes subjects out of the traps of common sense and reinforced established norms. Queer aesthetics and disruptive performances are queer theories' politics¹⁷⁹ because they disrupt and exposes.¹⁸⁰

Numerous theorists see performance as a way to resignify space to create a location where queer people feel safer and to use as a source of power and community organizing.¹⁸¹ Joan Nestle recounts lesbian survival in 1950s New York City. Through submitting to policing and silence, lesbians were able to create a space to exist. This seems dismal, but Nestle writes that it was also a gift; they had nowhere else to go.¹⁸² Spatial existences such as this allowed for the development of an identity and a network of sexually othered people to form. This creates a foundation for later social movements. John Brube, Gordon Brent Ingram, Ty Geltman, and

¹⁷⁸ George Chauncey, Elizabeth Kennedy, Medline D. Davis, and Brett Beemyn provide excellent accounts of gay/lesbian counterpublics. Chauncey described how in the early twentieth century New York City, gay men through coding established spaces and marked themselves as gay to create a sometimes-hidden-sometimes-visible gay culture. The occupation of space provided an outlet and the building of a subculture. Kennedy and Davis demonstrate how lesbians in Buffalo, NY used lesbian bars as public spheres to end isolation and create a community consciousness. Beemyn similarly shows this occurrence among gay white men in Washington, DC (George Chauncey *Gay New York* (1994), Elizabeth Kennedy and Medline D. Davis "I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar" (1997), and Brett Beemyn "A Queer Capital" (1997)).

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Wilson suggests that queer activists and theorists reliance on aesthetic politics of transgression is dangerous because it reinforces norms and creates a weaker and possibly fascistic politics. She does not want to disregard transgressive acts, but instead see them as a tactic within a political project, not as a political project by itself (Elizabeth Wilson "Is Transgression Transgressive?" (1993)).

¹⁸⁰ Michael Warner *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005)

¹⁸¹ Gordon Brent Ingram et al. "Lost in Space" (1997)

¹⁸² Joan Nestle "Restriction and Reclamation" (1997)

Carrie Moyer describe the creative, humorous, parodic, and utilitarian tactics used to claim streets and parks for the purpose of protesting and contesting AIDS policies, homophobia, heterosexism, sexism, or patriarchy or the right to exist within space. These theorists see the state and the public sphere as the target of protests because they deny GLBT people access to space or a voice. They see these tactics as creating the potential for change within normative and exclusionary spaces.¹⁸³

Like Shane Phelan, Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman show the dangers of accepting citizenship as is. Berlant chronicles Reaganite rhetoric's altering of the active and involved citizen to a passive and private-sphere driven subject.¹⁸⁴ People maintain and enforce conservative ideals in not only their families, but also other families for the sake of nation. The protection of imagined fetuses and children from perversion becomes paramount to politics. The state works to affirm heteronormativity for the sake of children and punish non-reproductive and non-heteronormative sexuality due to their perversion and inability to reproduce. This government-style defers all political goals to the future and treats citizen as incapable of managing their lives. Like the queer theorists above, Berlant argues that marginalized people can use the public sphere to reveal power structures.¹⁸⁵ Berlant calls these moments "diva citizenship"; they create an intimacy between subaltern and privileged citizens via the public sphere. This exposes privileged citizens to inequalities and counter-histories and creates an

¹⁸³ John Grube "No More Shit" (1997), Gordon Brent Ingram "'Open' Space as Strategic Queer Sites" (1997) Ty Geltman "The Queer Nation Acts Up" (1997), and Carrie Moyer "Do You Love the Dyke in Your Face?" (1997)

¹⁸⁴ Roger Lancaster argues that Berlant's discussion of private matters as a political distraction is not accurate. This is at the heart of capitalism's production of gendered subjects for economic value. Queer theorists need to take capitalism's role as seriously as they took resignification (Roger Lancaster *The Trouble with Nature* (2003)).

¹⁸⁵ David Bell argues that the position of "citizen-pervert," the subject who has a "scary" sexual practice (Bell relies on Gayle Rubin's sexual hierarchy to define scare sex), reveals the limits of citizenship. A citizen does not have the right to privacy; homosexuals, sadomasochists, and prostitutes are routinely jailed because of private sex acts. Bell calls for a new ethics of citizenship that regulates sexuality on consent alone (David Bell "Pleasure and Danger" (1994)).

active citizen model.¹⁸⁶ Edelman argues that queerness opposes current politics, which always already serve the future child. A political project or utopia based in queerness cannot occur because of queer sex produces no future.¹⁸⁷ Queerness is a position to disrupt, not an identity or cause. This is its strength though and not its failure. Through the death drive, which refuses satiation, queerness resists the Symbolic reality by embracing the perpetual movement and repetition of sexuality. It can reveal sex as sex and as intelligible. Edelman argues for an ethics of betterment and enjoyment (jouissance) in the now that promises nothing.¹⁸⁸

Janet Jakobsen critiques queer politics for lacking particularity, clarity, and specificity, which makes queer an empty gesture. Theorists need to be specific about which norms they critique or are rejecting because a call to reject all norms is impossible. Critiquing binaries may be important, but it is also extremely difficult. The binary system is incoherent and contradictory; these contradictions work to prove the dominant system as always correct. For example, homosexuality is considered both animalistic and unnatural; no matter how homosexuals argue for their right to exist, they are wrong. Revealing and exposing contradictions through logical arguments does nothing because the system is illogical. Jakobsen argues for examining the system as a whole to reveal connections and possible alliances between groups that suffer under the regime of normativity; this collective could challenge the regime of normativity, instead of attacking individual norms or norms in general. She offers a politics based on doing differently to create relations and ways of being outside binary oppositions.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Lauren Berlant *The Queen of America Goes to Washington* (1997)

¹⁸⁷ Judith Halberstram builds off this concept by examining the possibility within the GLBT community of building an alternative concept of time through the rejection of longevity and the heteronormative lifecycle (Judith Halberstram *In A Queer Time & Place* (2005)).

¹⁸⁸ Lee Edelman *No Future* (2004)

¹⁸⁹ Janet Jakobsen "Queer is? Queer Does?" (1998)

Leo Bersani warns against theories that erase the homosexuality identity because of its inability to accurately reflect lived experience.¹⁹⁰ He agrees that identities discipline subjects and that subjects always exceed their identities, but this should not lead to erasing the homosexual position; erasing homosexuality does the work of homophobes.¹⁹¹ He wants not to impose a way of being, but detail gay specificity through reworking gender and sexual categories into a complex matrix that allows for difference within desire. Desire tests limits within identity positions to question the categorizations and create new positions and practices. For example, homosexuals can resignify and legitimize sodomy by making it apart of their subjectivity and then arguing for the acceptance of this subjectivity. This is not possible without an original position.

Bersani acknowledges that homosexuality as an identity and a community creates a better life for homosexuals. However, it causes assimilation. To combat this, gays need to embrace and cultivate the anti-communitarian disposition already within their subjectivity. This movement would reject the idea of a large homosexual community, assimilation, and the policing of the self; sexual preference is not salient enough to form a community. A new way of coming together needs to be created. Relationality can be redefined by homo-ness. Psychoanalysis shows sexuality as a powerful weapon against the disciplinary politics of identities. The subject uses pleasure to defeat power and momentarily undo subjectivity causing boundaries and coherence to disappear. The desire for a lack is not present in homosexual desire, instead homosexuals seek repetition and intensification; men come together in more and new ways to share pleasure. This

¹⁹⁰ Simon Watney agrees with Bersani, but speaks about how ignoring gay community and identity can lead to an ignorance of HIV/AIDS and the powerful activism done by the GLBT community to fight for HIV/AIDS programming (Simon Watney *Imagine Hope* 2000)

¹⁹¹ He argues that Halperin and Butler's theories reject homosexuality to the point of erasing the place of resistance. While Wittig's theory that lesbianism destroys gender categories makes little sense because lesbianism is defined by gender.

knowing (because of a shared sameness) and not knowing each other that leads to the democratization of pleasure. This is sex without thinking beyond the movement. This denies assumptions, ideals, and expectations. It allows a rethinking of communication and community.¹⁹² Perverse desire creates momentary solidarities and communities with shifting member and shattered identities.¹⁹³

Jeffrey Escoffier attacks both assimilationists and queer theorists. The latter need realistic accounts of economics, lived experience, cultural norms and belonging incorporated into their theories. Too often queer theorists pretend subjects can step outside of society and start anew. Instead of radical change, the currently existing public spheres and political institutions should be reformed to create possibilities for the betterment of gay and lesbian lives. Some amount of mainstreaming is likely to happen and should be encouraged. At the same time, activists should constantly question and contest societal structures and the limits of identities. Currently, gay assimilations seek inclusion into an unjust system and deny the positive impact that a separate homosexual culture has had at easing gay and lesbian's ability to be. A gay and lesbian community must establish cultural, economic, and social networks that provide spaces of comfort and critique. This allows the movement to have a position within the structure and still maneuver and critique within and without their community.¹⁹⁴

Dennis Altman tracks the rise and fragility of the gay and lesbian community that Escoffier wishes to strengthen. Against Escoffier, he writes that building institutions, geographic

¹⁹² Leo Bersani *Homos* (1995)

¹⁹³ He repeats these sentiments in "Is the Rectum the Grave?" to argue against gay and lesbian theorists who attempt to keep bathhouses open for the sake of community and utopian dreams. Instead, he argues they should be kept open because they cause trauma to the ego, allow for the destabilizing subjectivity, and the embracing of powerlessness (Leo Bersani "Is the Rectum the Grave?" (1987)).

¹⁹⁴ Jeffrey Escoffier *American Homo* (1998)

Shane Phelan and R.W. Connell echo Escoffier's critique of assimilation and queer activism. Both argue for political engagement with social institutions and the government and not just semiotic transgressions (Shane Phelan "The Space of Justice" (1995) and R.W. Connell "Democracies of Pleasure" (1996))

isolation, community development move towards a minority model of activism and not the creation of systemic change. This ability to build a strong community is largely the result of homosexual's complacency with, subjugation to, and use of capital. Altman argues that a capitalistic community is fragile as it depends on maintaining capital.¹⁹⁵ Losing capital could end the movement. This commercial movement maintains the status quo by reinforcing gender, racial, and class hierarchies. Altman wants the affirmation of homosexuality to lead to the dissolution of homosexuality and heterosexuality.¹⁹⁶

In *Cherry Grove, Fire Island* (1993), Esther Newton contributes to the documentation of the gay and lesbian community's rise. Her view of capitalism role in the community is slightly more complicated than Altman's. Her ethnographic work focuses on the establishment of a community (Cherry Grove, Fire Island) where homosexuality was the norm. The controlling of geography through economic and symbolic power provided a safe haven for homosexuals until the 1960s. Newton recognizes the privilege that existed for the few who were able to create a gay community, but details how this aided the sustaining of gay and lesbian people and culture. She shifts her tone on capitalism when Cherry Grove's isolation ended after the 1960s. Gay tourists and renters turned the community into a gay theme park. A benefit of this was that it created economic diversity on the island. However working class gays and lesbians worked in the town's service industry and were treated with disdain by the property owners. Despite growing class conflict, the town remained apolitical. It took no role in the gay and lesbian movement. They saw themselves as already liberated. Their fantasy world made sexuality a private and leisure activity.

¹⁹⁵ Samuel R. Delany provides an account of capitalist dependent sex culture's fragility in New York City. Time Square once held a large concentration of sex theatres, pornography shops, and sex clubs frequented by those with marginal and non-marginal sexualities. The government and corporations used homophobia and sex panics to gentrify and destroy the sex culture within Time Square. Subsequently undermining friendships, relations, and a vibrant culture (Samuel R. Delany *Time Square Red, Time Square Blue* (1999)). Michael Warner also writes about the power of zoning laws in destroying a commercialized sex culture (Michael Warner *The Trouble with Normal* (1999)).

¹⁹⁶ Dennis Altman *The Homosexualization of America* (1983)

Newton does not condemn the community for its apolitical nature, but sees the population's stance as a reflection of their generational and class values. They created a community where sexuality did not matter and cared little about the outside world.¹⁹⁷

AFFECT

Within the past decade, theories of affect have grown out of queer theory, gay and lesbian studies, and psychoanalysis. These theories complicate our understanding of the body, how subjects are governed, and shame's role in subject formation. They centralize the feeling and porous body in their theories. By studying affect, we attempt to grasp the unpredictability and complexity that is the feeling subject. There is no way to predict how people will act because we cannot know how they will feel; they do not even know they feel or what they feel. This is not to negate the study of affect, but to understand better how feeling plays a central role in disrupting, building, and regulating subjects.

Benedict de Spinoza's theorization of the mind and body interrelate helped develop contemporary theories of affect. The body is more than just the physical; it is always relating, affecting, and positioning the subject. Societies do not use logic, but morality to cultivate affective responses and deter behaviors.¹⁹⁸ Even if one transgresses a norm and commits an immoral act, the feeling of shame will stay with the subject hindering a likely reoccurrence. This trauma alters their subjectivity. Spinoza's theory demonstrates how creating a cultural aesthetic is more powerful than reasoning with subjects. This system explains how same-sex sexual acts

¹⁹⁷ Esther Newton *Cherry Grove, Fire Island* (1993)

that are logically similar to opposite-sex sexual acts can produce different affective responses and moral outrage.

Additionally, multiple affects exist and are felt within the body at the same time. Stimuli produce multiple, contradictory, hidden, and unintelligible affects. Affects do not just create feeling, but alter each other and trigger past affective memories. Cultural expectations cause subjects to value one affect over others and label their body as feeling that way. The other affects do not disappear, but are preserved within the body and will impact the subject's affective response to stimuli in the future. Affective responses depend on the subject's own past and the external object's power; they cannot be predicted. For example, not all subjects react the same to shame or do not register acts as shameful, especially if shame has become a core affect. Affective multiplicity allows shame to exist at the same time as pleasure, excitement, and curiosity. These can hinder the affect of shame and cause variant reaction to shame.¹⁹⁹

Brian Massumi continues Spinoza's theory and creates a way to discuss how past affective experiences impact subjects. Every experience, impulse, and affect enfolds into the subject's psyche causing the psyche to retain stimuli and affective responses, but not be constantly aware of them. They become repressed and bracketed off from consciousness. At times, certain bracketed memories momentarily uncoil and alter the subject. Unfolding does not create definitive responses, but instead produce affective tendencies. He highlights the subject's inability to understand the numerous affective responses or register how they feel, accurately. This is partly because there is an affective present.²⁰⁰ The present is too quick to be perceived or happen. Massumi labels the present's missing condition as virtual; it is the "realm of potential,"

¹⁹⁹ Benedict de Spinoza *Ethics* (1677)

²⁰⁰ This is similar to Spinoza's thought that no "passional present" exists.

where the affective enfolding is unknown and unpredictable. Massumi reminds us that the world is not just discourse, that bodies do things outside of discourse and without register.²⁰¹

Silvan Tompkins intervenes not on rational attempts to understand the subject (like Spinoza and Massumi do), but on a theory of an irrational subject, psychoanalysis. Tompkins writes that the primary motivational source for subjects is not the psychoanalytic drive system, but the affect system. Tompkins does not negate drives, but resituates them. The psychoanalytic term “drive” falsely incorporates affect-driven motivations. The subject and their affect system is neither discourse or programmed from birth; the position of the subject lies somewhere between the two. The affect system responds to a stimulus, creating a desire or drive within a subject that is beyond their control. Affective aims differ from subject to subject and a wide range of aims could satiate the affect. An aims creation depends on an unlimited number of internal and external influences; the affect system is more independent than the drive system, which needs specific aims (such as water to satiate thirst). The variability of objects that could satiate the affect creates a type of freedom for subjects. Subjects must address the system, to maintain balance, but how they do so depends on the subject’s cultural, biological, and social experiences. There is an element of choice but these experiences tend to inhibit subjects from seeking certain aims. Shame can inhibit a subject into not satisfying an affective desire. It serves as a punishment for norm violation that stays with the subject after the violation is over. The memory of negative affective responses can create tendencies to avoid objects or acts.²⁰²

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick builds on Tompkins’s theory and provides insight into how affect houses the potential to produce something outside of the normative. Central to her work is an interrogation of J.L. Austen’s semiotic theory, which proclaims that uttering words is a

²⁰¹ Brian Massumi *Parable for the Virtual* (2002)

²⁰² Silvan Tompkins *Shame and its Sisters* (1962-91)

performativity act that has affect. Austen centralizes the marriage performance in his argument; two individuals say, “I do” in front of an authority figure and then become legally bonded. This singular active performance depends on witnesses to validate the performance.²⁰³ These witnesses compose the periperformance, an act that occurs beside the performance. It is a relational act, but not an egalitarian act; the witnesses do not have as much power as those in the performance. Sedgwick queers the witnesses’ performances by imagining witnesses who change the performance through refusal or interference. The act of refusing to witness a wedding negatively affects those being wed because it fails to validate the act. Those being wed desire silent witnesses that validate their exclusive contract. Affective relationships are validated or excluded through such performances. Sedgwick asks what would happen if subjects refused passivity.

Sedgwick explains how socialization produces the affect of shame within queer subjects; shame is culturally imposed to validate heterosexuality and does not come naturally from the subject. Sedgwick sees shame as central to queer performativity and same-sex desire,²⁰⁴ queers produce a sense of meaning and being around shame.²⁰⁵ This negative affect creates possibilities within the limited scope of identity politics. It affectively intensifies or alters other affects and disrupts everyday life therefore creating potential outside the norm.²⁰⁶

A central aspect of affect is relationality; Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips explore new ways of feeling thorough relations. Bersani uses the example of the psychoanalytic clinic, a

²⁰³ J.L. Austen’s *How To Do Things With Words* (1962)

²⁰⁴ Kathryn Bond Stockton through a comparative literature study draws connections between the shame felt by queers and blacks and the political potential of embracing abjection. (See Kathryn Bond Stockton *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame* 2002).

²⁰⁵ Leo Bersani agrees that shame is central to queer subjectivity, but does not want theorists to boost shame’s influence to the point that it removes all agency from subject’s life. He provides the example of theorists who state that barebackers have unprotected sex because shame causes them to want death. (See Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips *Intimacies* (2008))

²⁰⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *Touching Feeling* (2003)

space where people have an almost egalitarian relationship found on becoming intimate without having sex (ideally). Intimacy between the analysand and analyst arises out of the analysand's ability to talk freely and the analyst's willingness to listen. These actions must be done actively and not simply out of obligation. It is "a relation context that needs, indeed allows for nothing more than virtual being."²⁰⁷ These two people need nothing more from each other than to be there and be involved. To reach its potential, Bersani wants to de-medicalize and de-professionalize the psychoanalytic setting. Intimacy between strangers minimizes consequences and allows the past or promise of a future to be negated. People could be honest and expect nothing more from each other than what is promised. Bersani sees the great potential in this relational model, but believes it can only work in isolation, outside of the real. Bersani continues exploring impersonal intimacy through barebacking. Like the psychoanalytic situation, barebacking is two people meeting with no past or promise of the future. They are present and clear about what they want from the other. Power relations do not deceive participants; it is honest in what it promises. While this way of relation overcomes barriers, Bersani is unsatisfied with its inability to be political. Phillips reiterates that sex should not be thought of as the most personal connection that people share. This idea of sex as a revealing moment forces subject into prescribed narratives and not relate based off need or desire. Shame allows a separation for the imaginary version of self and the ego-ideal. The subject can see the difference between the prescribed ideal and their life. To embrace shame grants a potential to reform the self and dismantle the civilized self.²⁰⁸

Ann Cvetkovich examines communities that form from sharing similar affective experiences. Similar to Phillips and Bersani's groups, affective communities are outside usual

²⁰⁷ Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips *Intimacies* (2008) 28

²⁰⁸ Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips *Intimacies* (2008)

prescriptive communities and therefore relate in unpredictable ways. Cvetkovich complicates trauma through affect by disavowing a singular causality to a traumatic action. Negative actions do not only produce negative affects. This theory allows oppressed people a productive space beyond victimization and to move beyond coping. They create a space within the nation to discuss trauma not recognized in the national public sphere, blur boundaries between pleasure and trauma, and refuse simplified relations. She theorizes that subjects experiencing few affects will reach exhaustion, and become complacent. Sameness stagnates and causes relations to fail. To keep a movement, relationships, subjects going new affects need to be felt. Subjects should refuse the conventional level and experience relations in multiple ways, allowing the person to not simply be subjected to the happening, but active and confronting it. Affective communities are not static or everlasting, but this seems to be the point.²⁰⁹

Didion Eribon's *Insult and the Making of Gay Self* (2004) examines gay subjectivity as the product of an affective threat, the insult. The effective subjugation of gays and lesbians supports Spinoza's theory that governing is done through affective threats and not rationality. The subjugation of gays is an exaggerated and overtly conscious form of heterosexual subject formation. A subject is always subordinate to a larger and more powerful mechanism (order, rules, laws, and norms) that attempt to define and organize the subject. Eribon's theorization states that within this system of subordination there exists inferior positions, where people face even more constraints.²¹⁰ This form of subjugation is not new, despite change, the gay and

²⁰⁹ Ann Cvetkovich *An Archive of Feelings* (2003)

²¹⁰ Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint* (2008) tracks the evolution of women's subordinate subjectivity into an affective community through gender-marked commodities. These commodities manipulate through sentimentality and convention for a deferred (irrational) heteronormative fantasy. This creates citizens concerned with attachment, feeling, and affect management, a non-political version of citizenship that perpetuates and ignores power structures. Sexuality becomes the arena of adjustment where the promises of sentimentality will not be fulfilled. This failure and unsatisfactorily satiated drive could usher in the female complaint, a counter-hegemonic reaction to sentimentality that occurs when women realize promised fantasies are inconsistent with reality. This failure can

lesbian experience maintains affective continuity. Insult's symbolic violence clings to gay subjectivity. Insult, an affective trauma, reminds gays and lesbians of their vulnerability. The insulting agent's performative act claims power over the GL subject via the ability to do harm and reduce a subject to an idea. The insult becomes central to the creation of a gay self by imbedding itself into the body and memory of the GL subject. The subject stating their gayness is an affirmation; to claim the negative is to complicate what is expected. This provides a productive starting point for what Eribon calls resubjugation, a process where a person forms their identity off of previous iterations of this identity and then begins the process of self-making.²¹¹ Heather Love discusses past queer affects, and like Eribon, shows how little change has occurred. Love discusses the erasure and rewriting of the queer past occurring in GLBTQ activism and scholarship creates a false sense of the past that does not allow a realistic version of the systemic and long oppression of sexual minorities. Leaving behind the negative appears to be productive, however the fantasy does not allow for political engagement with the actual.²¹²

Conclusion

Summarizing the field in a closing statement seems to be not as important as asking where do we go from here. Continuing in field fashion, I will not use my own words, but briefly describe three works that push in the right direction. These works are not all contemporary, but do have much to contribute to the present. All three look outside normative ways of recognizing relationality and attempt to work towards new subjectivities and feeling through questioning how

inspire a refusal of old attachments and affects and a creation of new attachments and fantasies that do not reproduce gender conventions.

²¹¹ Didion Eribon *Insult and the Making of Gay Self* (2004)

²¹² Heather Love *Feeling Backwards* (2009)

subjects understand themselves via language. They do not prescribe to a politics, but offer suggestions towards betterment and the fulfillment of subjects.

Roland Barthes describes language as fascistic and aggressive; it demands identification, gender, binaries, and cohesiveness. Language makes subjects refuse the other and oversimplify themselves. Barthes strives toward the Neutral, which transcends difference through attempting to have no meaning, be unpredictable, and baffle the rules of language. It is a striving towards living without wanting to possess.²¹³ In these lectures, Barthes describes tenets of queer theory before queer theory was. It provides an outline for an almost impossible politics, but not one that should be dismissed. This politics lacks a straightforward agenda, but asks subjects to defy categories imposed and experience what is said cannot be experienced.

In *Equals* (2003), Adam Phillips continues the psychoanalytic critique of politics by interrogating democracy's production of normativity and questioning people's ability to do justice and know what justice is. The purpose of democracy is to make diverse and differently advantaged individuals equal. However, democracy often forces sameness upon individuals in the name of equality. This creates an enforced norm and chosen good causing the inhibition of actions, feelings, and sexualities outside the chosen good. Phillips suggests that the psychoanalytic situation could create a more democratic and equal society with freer individuals. The process of psychoanalytic listening allows difference to exist and conflict to be enjoyable and productive. This new way of being would shift sexuality away from an inhibited, destructive, and shame inducing aspect of self and into a more integral part of subjects. By moving away from false ideas of equality, less prescriptive forms of life emerge, allowing subjects to create new associations, experiment with life, and allow needs to become apparent.²¹⁴

²¹³ Roland Barthes *The Neutral* (1974)

²¹⁴ Adam Phillips *Equals* (2003)

Peter M. Nardi writes about gay men's friendships and how they impact gay social movement and identity. Gay men, excluded from normative ways of relating and similarly marginalized, construct new "family relations" by centralizing and constructing new forms of friendship, which can include sexual relations. Nardi argues that these friendships can become reciprocal relationships, where individuals work at creating and supporting each other and themselves through this relation. These subjects recognize and listen to each other in order to fulfill the other's needs. This allows for betterment and community to be central to self.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Peter M. Nardi *Gay Men's Friendships* (1999)

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